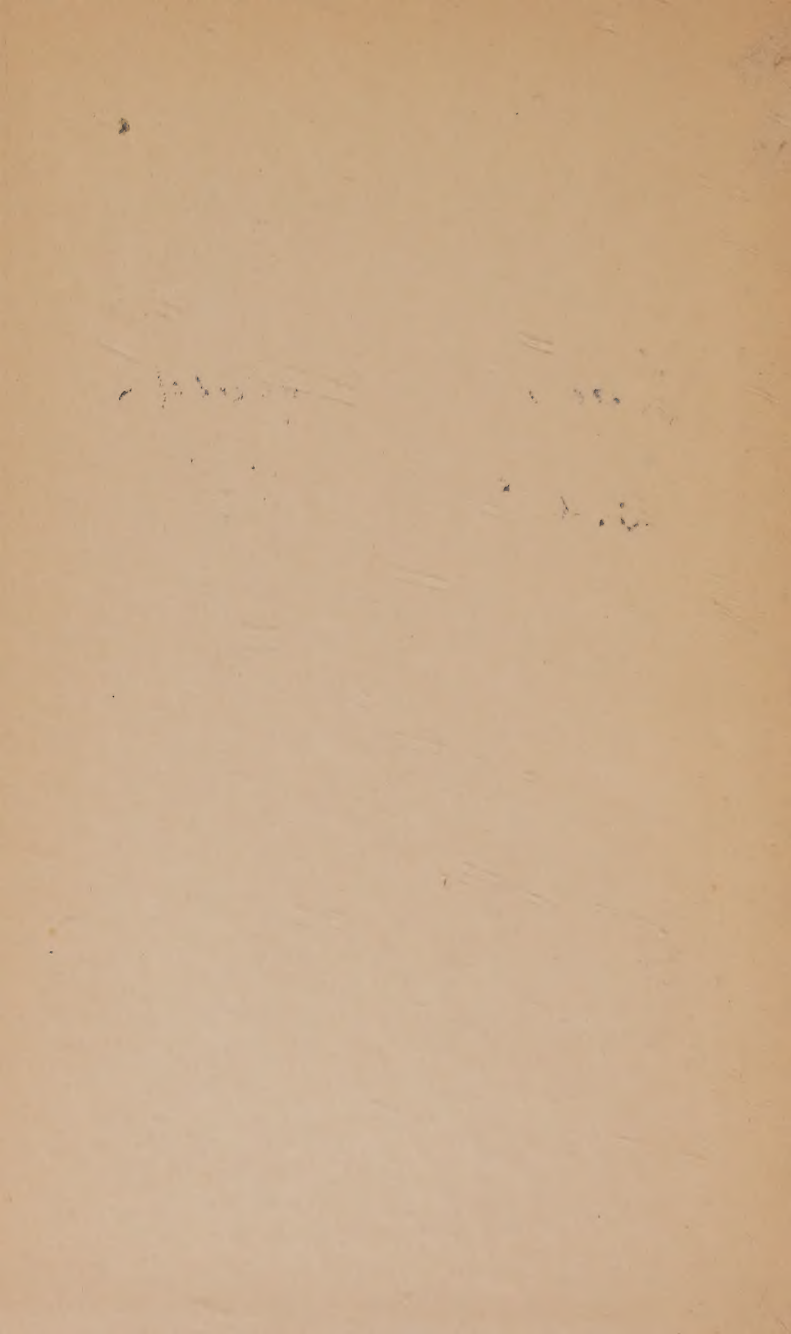






# IMAGINATION AND RELIGION

*OTHER BOOKS BY THE SAME AUTHOR*

WILLIAM OWEN: A BIOGRAPHY.

CHARLES DARWIN AND OTHER ENGLISH THINKERS.

THE THREE RELIGIOUS LEADERS OF OXFORD  
AND THEIR MOVEMENTS.

AMBASSADORS OF GOD.

CHRISTIANITY AND THE STATE.



# IMAGINATION *and* RELIGION

*By*

S. PARKES CADMAN

THE COLE LECTURES FOR 1924  
DELIVERED BEFORE VANDERBILT  
UNIVERSITY

NEW YORK  
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1926

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TO  
HARRY GAGE SPICER AND GERTRUDE SPICER  
WHOSE FRIENDSHIP  
HAS ILLUMINATED HIS LIFE,

THIS VOLUME IS  
AFFECTIONATELY DEDICATED  
BY THE AUTHOR





## THE COLE LECTURES

The late Colonel E. W. Cole, of Nashville, Tennessee, donated to Vanderbilt University the sum of five thousand dollars, afterwards increased by Mrs. E. W. Cole to ten thousand, the design and conditions of which gift are stated as follows:

“The object of this fund is to establish a foundation for a perpetual Lectureship in connection with the Biblical Department of the University, to be restricted in its scope to a defense and advocacy of the Christian religion. The lectures shall be delivered at such intervals, from time to time, as shall be deemed best by the Board of Trust; and the particular theme and lecturer shall be determined by nomination of the Theological Faculty and confirmation of the College of Bishops of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South. Said lecture shall always be reduced to writing in full, and the manuscript of the same shall be the property of the University, to be published or otherwise disposed of by the Board of Trust at its discretion, the net proceeds arising therefrom to be added to the foundation fund, or otherwise used for the benefit of the Biblical Department.”



## A FOREWORD

It would be difficult to exaggerate the effect produced on the University community and the Nashville public by Dr. Cadman's lectures on *Imagination and Religion*. Those who had previously been moved by the impassioned oratory of this great preacher were scarcely prepared for the clearness and the force with which he expounded a difficult subject or for the style of the written discourse. Along with all who heard them I rejoice that the lectures are now to be given to a wider public.

I have often said that "imagination" is the most misunderstood word in the English language. When rightly understood and interpreted, as in this volume, its cultivation becomes a matter of prime importance in education, in religion, in political and social science, as well as in the fine arts. Dr. Cadman's extensive reading enables him to bring a wealth of illustration to bear on the exposition and application of the term. The volume is, in fact, an illustration of the theme. What might so easily have been an abstract and purely intellectual presentation of a difficult subject becomes concrete, vivid and real. Only a man of profound imagination could have conceived and worked out such a presentation of the subject.

There is one particular effect of the lectures that I should like to emphasize. The University audience, and especially the students, were awakened to the

vital elements in religion when divorced from dogmatic theology and pedantic terminology. The interpretation of the Bible as a book created by the religious imagination of gifted men was calculated to increase its appeal to all sorts and conditions of men. The volume ought to be a great stimulus to a more vital faith. The author is at once modern and devout, deeply spiritual and intellectual, a realist with his arms stretched toward the infinite, and an idealist with his feet on the ground. He knows the difference between mysticism and Christian idealism.

EDWIN MIMS

*Professor of English, Vanderbilt University.*

## PREFACE

The delay in publishing these lectures is due to the unavoidable duties of my position as President of the Federal Council of the Churches of Christ in America. They were originally intended to include the relation of the Imagination to Christian architecture and art and to the theology of mysticism and fiction. Owing to the limitations of space the treatment of these questions will have to appear in a later volume. That which appears now consists in great measure of the notes used for the deliverance of the lectures.

I desire to thank the Reverend Oscar L. Joseph, Litt.D., and Professor Edwin Mims of Vanderbilt University, Nashville, Tennessee, for their generous assistance in verifying the quotations and correcting the proofs of these lectures.

S. PARKES CADMAN.

Central Congregational Church,  
Brooklyn, N. Y.





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# IMAGINATION AND RELIGION



# IMAGINATION AND RELIGION

## CHAPTER I

### THE POWER OF IMAGINATION

Imagination is the premier factor in all thought and life—It must keep in touch with realities to guard against haughty intellectualism and fantastic emotionalism—Memory is the ally of imagination to reproduce the past—The appeal to the five senses is effective when stimulated by imagination—The creative imagination has its limitations and liberties—Realities clothed by imagination in myths and legends—Six primary methods of transforming reality by imagisms—The need for new forms of imagism in art, literature and religion.

Imagination is scientifically defined as the faculty of forming an image in the mind. As an actual and constructive power it is quite as definite as any one of the physical senses and infinitely more important in its range and operation. For by imagination we form mental pictures of objects before we think them, and only by constant recourse to these pictures does the mind proceed to know and to comprehend. Imagination also enables the mind to penetrate the super-sensuous world by weaving out of the subtle, illusive and invisible ether of thought those images which are essential to creative thinking, and which constitute its original material. Legends, myths, literatures, laws, philosophies, sciences, arts and religions are alike indebted to this power. It

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is the pioneer in everything concerning the unseen; the source of the creative energy transmuted into peace and war, religion and politics, education and industry, and all artistic enterprises. Out of its strength has come beauty; not only the fragile beauty of decay, but that inward loveliness which indicates man's spiritual discoveries and moral conquests.

Its diversified operations cover nearly everything within the realm of human vision and achievement. When absorbed in facts, sustained by reality and regulated by critical intelligence, imagination has evolved those ideals that have determined the better conduct of life. It has boldly flung the gauntlet in the face of outworn creeds and traditions. It reaches into what is general and abstract that this may be expressed in the concrete symbols of familiar intercourse. Since ideas invariably run ahead of actual experiences, we must therefore acquire mental pictures of objects before we can conceive them. Certainties of the visible and speculations about the invisible realm are thus brought before us. The mind then proceeds to their examination, studying out the nature of things, how they work and their underlying harmony or difference. Vividness of imagination determines the clearness and range of apprehension; its breadth and sympathy determine freedom from prejudice and unreason. If these statements are trustworthy, Joseph Addison's dictum that a sound imagination ranks with a correct judgment and a good conscience as life's three best endowments can be safely accepted.

I do not desire, however, to treat it as an abstruse matter of mental science but as a vital factor pulsating more or less vigorously in every human being.

You may know individuals without the sense of humor, or without hope and even without love; but none exists without faith and its great ally, imagination. The most hard-bitten materialist succumbs to its sway. Its ubiquity testifies to an unquenchable delicacy in the grossest members of the race. It is the lamp aflame in the soul's sanctuary; the vision and the dream behind the deed. The story of its uses is an amazing record of radiance and darkness, of splendid articulations and cruel dismemberments. It anticipated the dawn of men's intellectual morning by generating the countless vagaries of the primeval cults. It obtained a triumphant ascendancy in the Greek mind, so that, despite the domestic or foreign strife which went on in that nation, it bequeathed to aftertimes the exhaustless product of a noble and a disciplined imagination. On the other hand, in eras of degeneracy, such as that of Italian culture during the seventeenth century, it has produced some of the most formidable obstacles to human progress. To change the metaphor, in those periods in which imagination gained freedom by becoming a distinctive force for righteousness, it may be likened to a copious fountain whose sparkling waters spread in broad streams to fructify otherwise barren wastes.

In every conclusion, whether it is deduced from its premises or is an inference drawn from facts, an actual work of imagination has taken place. This process may be so compressed, spontaneous and of such seeming simplicity as to appear no more than an instinctive or intuitional movement of the mind. But the theory that it is always an intelligent process, compacted by imagination and subject to analysis, has substantial grounds. Our subject



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is invested with the utmost seriousness because imagination is the sole intellectual force which operates in direct contact with the physical organs. It acts by producing in them, or in those parts of the brain with which they communicate, replicas of states due to external objects perceptually present. The eye, the ear, the nose, the palate and the skin may become in turn the stage of these mobile impressions. Guilt and innocence are frequently discerned by outward signs due to the inward mysterious power which imagination exercises over the body. Curative influences elevating humanity from the depressions to which it is prone also spring from the same source. Unfortunately, however, certain mental humors are much more productive of evil images than of good ones. When dominated by the imagination the physical organism resembles plastic clay in the hands of the potter. Instances of its work can be quoted which range from sudden restoration to health to paralysis for life, and in extreme cases to instant death. No one can tell how much of the totality of man's thought and action is due to the images which have stamped themselves upon his mind and determined his moral nature. He carries the Day of Judgment within himself, and the trained eye can often detect his character as if it were an open book.

Let us dismiss, once and for all, the notion that imagination in itself is vague, misleading or chimerical. On the contrary, it is the premier endowment, not only of the poet, the artist, the actor and the orator, but of the scientist, the inventor, the merchant and the artisan. Its abuse in unrestrained image making may run to madness; but its abuse in undue repression breeds a sterility which robs a man

of actual wealth in himself and in his environment. Time and again, intellectual Bourbons and Philistines may forfeit gains of knowledge through defective imagination as surely as the insane person through his dissociated fancies. Too many people are like the mussel fastened to the rock, feeding on what chance may bring; while others resemble the eagle soaring above the plain and live ideally in the realms they create. Balzac did not copy from real life the hundreds of types which figure in his *Comédie Humaine*. He drew them out of his own personality first and then placed himself within their hearts and actually lived their mimic life. Homer, Dante, Shakespeare and the stupendously originaive group of writers to which they belong, have the sympathetic feeling and insight that go with the imagination. The presence of these qualities conjoined throughout their work accounts for its universal appeal. They are proofs that the whole of humanity is latent in a single individual. The few who summon imagination to the captaincy of their minds and faithfully record all that it compels to pass before their eyes are the masters of their craft. The abstractions of philosophers, remote though they may be, are nevertheless robed in images upon which they depend for recognition. The intensity of the convinced idealist often puts to shame the timidity of the opportunist, but not by reason of any difference in their parentage. For both idealist and opportunist are what they are because of that which they visualize by imagination. Within the palace of his dreams one artist entertains the empty phantoms and vain despairs of an earthbound existence, or again, another welcomes there those divine realities that transcend human

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capacity for expression. Here, as elsewhere, the will to escape the futilities of material illusion or of airy nothingness is necessary to consecutive and helpful thinking.

The imaginative mind must be on its guard against the tendency to withdrawal from familiar things and abandonment to dreamy theorizings which evade accepted realities. No artistry is so consummate that it does not need to be steeped in life's all-embracing stream. No system of thought can afford to despise the mother wit of common men because it falls far short of philosophical ideas of perfection. Much of the satire, misanthropy, irony and bitterness of some otherwise admirable imaginative products is traceable to the immense pride of gifted spirits who deal with life, not as it is, but according to their own inclinations and desires. We should avoid the extremes exhibited by those whose thought lumbers along on leaden feet, or those again, whose thinking is so far aloft that it is seldom in actual touch with their fellowmen. Both groups admonish us not to forsake the center between fact and fancy, nor to forget that he whose thought is firmly fixed on that center can usually attain real freedom. Since we have the treasures of the image making power in earthen vessels, we must see to it that its finest gestures conform to the racial experience. The aloofness of Intellectuals is not a rational attitude, any more than is the slavish deference of devotees to conventionality. Those who assume that every one or everything beyond their pale is worthless, and that their judgment partakes of the comprehension of infinity, are the sport of dreary forms of self-delusion. Their opposites, who refuse to attempt any flight from what they

know toward what they may discover by imagination's aid, act as a drag upon the forward march of the human mind. You may recall exceedingly clever people who have been overtaken in their shrewdness by their ban on the use of imagination. Others let their imagination run wild and become victims of egotistical obsessions. But the genuine princes of imagination also leap to one's recollection, who, like "that valiant, pathetic and entrancing gentleman," Claude Henri Saint-Simon, the French Socialist, dreamed, toiled and suffered to convert a skeptical and backslidden society to the simple Gospel rule: "Love one another."

Talents not nearly so versatile as his, when quickened by altruistic tendencies, have repeatedly become almost as alert and keen-sighted as genius itself. Schooled to regard a humane and believing life as the highest object of human endeavor, men and women with these ordinary talents so illuminated, distributed among all ranks and conditions of society, have promoted its lasting good. From their fine work, as much as from the achievements of celebrities, has proceeded the harmonious development of human nature's physical, mental and spiritual faculties among civilized nations. The men of exceptional vision in such nations are the ones who point out most clearly that the enrichment of soul and circumstance by religion, art, literature and music does not appear to be something beyond the province of all except a few extraordinary individuals. It is an endowment common to every citizen, enabling him to have intimate contact with what is beautiful and ennobling and to add his specific quota to the aggregate of social well-being. This faith in the more liberal use of imagi-

nation by the ordinary individual flourished in the days when the first thought of the statesman, the architect, the ecclesiastic and the poet was for the elevation of the life of peoples. In the ages which gave birth to fresh forms of the truths by which men and nations live, there was no need to subsidize or flatter distinguished personalities in order to get them to perform this priceless function. Prophets abounded in ancient Israel, and nearly every educated Englishman of the Elizabethan period could write a sonnet or round out a tune. When things social travel full circle and this general condition again prevails, imagination will be put to better uses than that of furnishing a mere veneer for the shoddy materialism which defiles modern existence and vitiates much of its output.

## II

Memory is the one faculty which can be truly termed bafflingly separate and a law unto itself. The mind depends upon it to provide nearly all that is basic in its higher operations; apart from it, intelligence would be impossible. Memory is indissolubly joined to imagination and in its finest replica, history, these two powers unite in drawing an outline on a spacious canvas of the lineaments of the Creator, creation and the human race. The heart's discernment of a Divine Order in the past is achieved by imagination and experience in combination. The inward harmony of outwardly divergent phenomena would be hidden to reason, were it not for this happy coöperation. It causes us, in Shakespeare's striking phrase, to

". . . . take upon's the mystery of things,  
As if we were God's spies."



For the preacher the indissoluble marriage between imagination and memory is of paramount importance. He has to minister to the exuberance of youth, the purposes of maturity and the reflections of age. These different stages run closely parallel to similar stages of growth in the mastery of imagination, by which his teachings for all three should be inspired and guided. In the work of communication with them he is soon made aware that logical deductions have little or no power by themselves of persuasion upon his hearers. They are influenced, not through the reason in the abstract, but through the imagination which vitalizes the truths of reason. This is the factor which establishes authoritative relations between him and his audience. He moves not only in the well-defined areas of religious thought and feeling, but also in those dim borderlands where knowledge shades into wonder before the inscrutable mysteries enshrouding life. Imagination is thus the arbiter of faith, emphasizing its prevalence in man, and convincing him that his strength and weakness, his grandeur and degradation depend upon his faith's health. It illuminates his mind for the spectacle; it connects the subject with the object, and the beholder with the vision. It supplies the foregrounds of religion here and those of its more perfect developments hereafter.

In the procession of images the ones that take precedence naturally are those of the senses. The hungry lad staring at tempting viands displayed in the restaurant window conceives a luxurious feast by means of previous meals which tasted deliciously good to the last mouthful. Though some scientists contend that even the love passion is nothing more

than a phosphorescence on the brain surface, no scientist can explain how the imaginary meal of the lad on the sidewalk so affects the glands of his mouth as to cause the digestive saliva to flow freely. Next to taste the sense of touch has very close relations with imagination. Multitudes of people of both sexes earn their living by the training which the nerve sensitiveness at their finger tips has received. They decide the quality of fabrics by images of the mind derived from repeated handling of the goods in question. Their decisions gain worth from their recollection of the fabrics they have previously examined. Only by this expert knowledge can they accurately judge new fabrics submitted to them. The musical critic likewise depends upon memory to reproduce the delicate shades of meaning experienced by him in renditions of symphonies and sonatas formerly heard. These "sound images" are the guides for his present and future estimates of the excellence or otherwise of any given performance. The expert worker in a Bessemer steel mill tells by the use of his imagination when the impurities of the molten metal have been forced out of it. "Sight images" packed away at the back of his brain have a resurrection and enable him to detect the exact moment when the metal must be released from its crucible. Any failure of accuracy on his part would probably mean mutilation or death to him and his assistants.

To turn from factories to Nature, Wordsworth believed as also did Shelley, that every flower enjoys the air it breathes. A distinguished scientist has recently written an interesting brochure concerning the reactions and vibrations connected with the growth of vegetation. He asserts that poetry,

philosophy and science must subtly blend in any true exposition of natural histories and make them "a palpitating parable of life." Smell, by which odors are stored in memory for future delight, may be taken in this sense as a commentary on our Lord's word that "Man does not live by bread alone." He is one with the multiform surrounding life which reveals concord in difference. The stars revolve, the air stirs, the winds blow for him; night and day are propitious to his growth. Through everything he tastes, touches, hears, sees and smells there runs the spinal cord of an ascertainable purpose.

A certain perfume will evoke thoughts too deep for tears in one individual; in another, every emotion of the heart will be kindled by a particular musical phrase. A walk in a garden or through a forest may bring both pleasant and painful associations, or revive with startling clearness events supposed to have been forgotten. Do we long to escape from ourselves; to be rid, if but for an hour, of the long continued struggle we wage; to transform our actual life into a dream of what might well be? We have but to inhale the scent of shrubberies and woods drenched in rain or listen to the song of the birds that shelter in them. What strange joys and stranger humiliations follow in the trail of the physical senses, under the dominion of imagination! Through it man battens on the universe, and though he seems to be an infinitesimal atom in its whirling systems, by sheer imagism he becomes its superior. Adrian le Corbeau's *The Forest Giant* is an exquisite illustration of this realism in Nature's fellowship with us. It is the story compactly told of a tree's seven thousand years of life spent in patient ascent and decline. Yet the narrative is so "delicate, its



implications so concrete and withal so lucid," as to contradict the complacent assumption that "in our life alone does Nature live." Through M. le Corbeau's evocation of the life history of this single tree, as Hugh I'A Fausset observes, "we seem to look into its very soul, and into the soul of man and of the universe too."<sup>1</sup>

If one questions the universality of image reproduction, let him think of his last summer's vacation. Its days of light and shade, its gorgeous nights, the solitude of the hills, the gleam of winding rivers and embosomed lakes, the green and gold of waving fields and the faces of his companions will be projected upon his mind by lightning-like strokes of visualization. He need not possess the reproductive force of Kingsley in *Westward Ho!* or of Moore in *Lalla Rookh*, authors who graphically describe what they never saw, in order to reproduce places and persons dear to him, and experience again the varied sentiments which they inspired.

From the first the sense of Nature's constancy has caused imagination to camp in its fortified loveliness. Contingencies seem to end when we look upon the ocean and the mountains. They furnish for multitudes the secret of imagination's power over life. History here enters its plea that no human activity is either so commonplace or barren as to be immune to this power. Nevertheless, it is the mightier aspects of the visible which tend to subdue and hallow personality. They color the complexion and sway the moods of the mind. In reading Charles Montague Doughty's gripping recital of his wanderings in Arabian solitudes, one feels that

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<sup>1</sup> *The Spectator Literary Supplement* (London), April 5, 1924.

his physical surroundings and his inner spiritual elements were so welded together that they became complementary and inseparable. George Macdonald saw the Jungfrau, unutterably solemn and grand, in mists as white as its own snows, and later wrote: "The clouds had curtained the mighty window and the Jungfrau withdrew into the Holy of Holies. . . . (but) from the mind it glorified it has never vanished. To have beheld a truth is an apotheosis. What the truth was I could not tell; but I had seen something which raised me above my former self, and made me long to rise higher yet."

Those who are successful in tasks which demand skill and energy are, as a rule, eighty per cent imaginative in their methods. Provided other conditions are equal, strong visualization means good work; weak visualization, bad work. Students who can see with the mind's eye the invisible pages of a Latin grammar will conjugate its verbs correctly in the examination room. Lovers of music who easily retain sound images can return from a concert and reproduce its different selections, though these were previously unknown to them. People of the former group are sometimes called Visiles, those of the latter, Audiles; and neither group is usually quick in both directions. Visiles often read and write foreign languages with facility, but do not speak them readily; they have to visualize the words before the brain can transmit their sense. Audiles have large capacity for reimagining sounds; they quickly reproduce languages spoken daily in their hearing without acquiring the ability to read or write them correctly. Visiles remember faces but

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forget to mail letters; Audiles repeat long conversations exactly but do not readily recall dates.

Plainly, the extent and diversity of the image making power have everything to do with desirable intellectual, aesthetic and religious progress. For though imagination is primarily engaged with images produced by the senses, it is also, in the fulness of its power, the constructive force behind every apprehension of improvement in life and its environs. Its reproductive function, which is to present the past, is in many ways no more remarkable than its other function, to transmute what is happening around us daily. We sense the poverty or wealth, the misery or comfort of our fellow creatures, according to the strength of our imaginative vision. Sympathetic natures have large possibilities, either for good or evil. Conduct is shaped by the ability to think as others think, to feel as they feel, to put oneself in another's place. Helpful criticism, just praise, deserved rebuke depend upon the part which imagination plays in human consciousness. It seizes the material for thought and gives it form and color, and that too, whether our thinking partakes of the sublime, the mediocre or the ridiculous. So the cultivation of images of the proper quality is a vital item in one's mental and moral curriculum. Nor can any person be conscientious and dependable in fulfilling the requirements of faith and law, without having had corresponding developments of imagination. The more pure and advanced are the stages reached by the science of life, the greater its demands for mental pictures of a high order. Indifference to the welfare of others is frequently chargeable to sluggish or prejudiced powers of visualization. The compunction which people

should feel about social iniquities is often wanting because of their intellectual astigmatism. The morning news informs us of severe destitution in one land, or of war's horrors in another. Immediate aid is solicited for the helpless orphans of Armenia or the famine-stricken millions of Russia and China. We act towards these catastrophes according to our ability to see and even to experience a vicarious counterpart of the anguish suffered by the real victims. In such creative ways, by means of the imagination, the social conscience has been evolved and amplified. The world is being saved daily by the constant and benevolent use of the universally diffused power which we discuss.

Progress and betterment, physical, moral or religious, in their beginnings are something desired or desirable. Every excellent thing in civilization is born of things that are, plus a vision of what they ought to be, whether in utilitarian or humane projects. Take the most commonplace example of an advertisement for the sale of a particular article. If this is a domestic utensil, the salesman divests himself of his masculine stupidity sufficiently to draw an attractive picture of the change it will introduce into the details of cooking or of house cleaning. If needs be, he can also depict stately marble halls, with dainty ladies and their handsome squires sauntering upon sloping terraces, and backgrounds which hint of an opulence beyond the dreams of avarice. So long as it sells his wares the ends of his propaganda are gained. It lives, moves and breathes in imagination's realm, and its methods can be adapted to everything purchasable, from a can opener to a billion dollar corporation. One happy stroke of this gift has frequently made a

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monetary fortune overnight. It explains the growing partnership of art with business, which promises to abolish the grotesque billboards that disfigure the approaches to our towns and cities. The managers of Great Britain's railroads have recently secured the services of two of her eminent artists to paint for public display the charms of their respective routes in that country. Technical schools which have concentrated upon the expansion of productive capacity in trade and commerce still have a long distance to go in this direction of putting the right premium upon the imagination. Even the colleges have been none too hospitable to educational codes which are not quickly profitable for business. The individual who gets a tenacious hold on practical affairs through hard experience is frequently shallow of mind and limited in outlook because he has not visualized life's higher possibilities. He has not even a passing acquaintance with its spiritual thinkers and interpreters. Modern learning is tempted to conform to the lower standards of utility rather than to those of a rich, stimulating imagination. Such a policy can only find favor with those who fail to understand that beauty is the most useful commodity. But their name is legion.

The best journalistic presentation in imaginative ways of current events or contemporary characters is, in my opinion, that of the well known periodical, *Punch*. Its artistically illustrated pages record the social and the political history of English-speaking nations of the past eighty-four years, and to a lesser degree, that of the world at large. Its artists and authors, by their contributions which have made this journal deservedly famous, have



rendered a prolonged public service which can hardly be overrated. Whims and fancies, principles and prejudices, morals and manners, democracy and imperialism, fashions and even theology are treated by the brilliant coterie meeting round the Mahogany Tree with a wit and wisdom which seldom miss the mark. Certainly nothing in journalism, not even our own *Life*, or the foremost of our dailies, has surpassed *Punch* in its provision for clergy and laity of a common fund of sagacious comments, pungent observations and humorous allusions, to say nothing of the fine drawings which embellish the printed matter. Preachers especially should read this journal for the sake of humanness, geniality, breadth, and to obtain relief from the banalities of religious controversy.

### III

Imagination has a third function in addition to those of reproducing the past and vivifying the present. It is creative in that it originates meritorious ideas, embodying them in poetry, prose, the material works of inventive genius and the numberless hypotheses of science. There are, however, limitations to the creative activity of this type of imagination. The man who would visualize anything both new and valuable must bind his supposed novelty to reality by bonds which cannot break. The region of reality may itself be whatever one pleases to select, ranging from the Dismal Swamp in Virginia to the Sistine Madonna. Once adopted, far-reaching variations may be imposed upon it. But no imaginative strength can overcome those fixed barriers which inhere in the nature of things as they are. A new combination of colors may be

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imagined, but not a new color. Nor can imagination conceive a universe where space does not exist. It may conceive a world with no instrument for recording time, but a world where time is not is inconceivable. Limitless as it appears to be, imagination must toe the line set for it by fundamentals like these. The assertion that during the last decade the issue in philosophy has been narrowed down to the question of the right connotations of the terms time and space, where the battle between realism and idealism has to be fought out, holds true in the universe of human apprehension. Our knowledge of the play of mechanism, the interraction of physical and chemical forces, the processes and results of mathematics and of biological inquiry, the speculations of ethics and metaphysics cannot penetrate beyond imagination's predetermined range. Its restrictions are their boundaries. Yet what an immense range it has in both the visible and invisible realms! How much it has already divined of all that can be done to man and of all that he can do! Within its bounds it offers an unfailing service of delight, even to those well stricken in years. It bids old and young find in every opening morning the dayspring of some truth new to them. It throws a halo around the most prosaic objects and commandeers every force to visualize what produced it or what it will produce.

The dramatic instinct grows strong on imagination's power of contrasts. The people it creates, the deeds they do and the things they say monopolize us, though they often speak and act in the accents of destiny against one's own desires. It has been pertinently observed that Turgenev's fiction is a first-class example of this process. His char-



acters tell us things that it would be a thousand pities not to know. In their walk and conversation they bring no railing accusations against life or society but are content to reveal the spiritual content and outworking of their personnel. The author's imagistic art is unstained by contempt; solemnly generous toward what is weak and sinful; full of intelligent appreciation for whatever is strong and righteous. Turgenev loved human nature without too much softness or too much rigidity, and explained it with a benign wisdom which few have compassed for themselves. What he accomplished the few have attempted from the first who believed that we see *with*, not through, the eye, and therefore should ever be ready to discern the spiritual dominions concealed by the curtain of the material and the sensuous. The normal course of their imaginative experience may be described as a cycle of expansion followed by a cycle of concentration. To the verities thus hammered into shape by imaginative thought they presently gave a visible setting in human behavior. For them legends were far more than idle dreams, and sacraments something else than empty symbols; they were factors sustaining vital relations to life and action.

Races of antiquity ascribed fabulous qualities and achievements to their gods and goddesses. Jaded by realities they could not comprehend, they sought refuge in romanticism. At its best, their lot in life was extremely hazardous. So they endeavored to alleviate its trials by varying the size, form, color and position of visible things in the romancings of their minds with a facility denied to their will. The significance of one object was credited to another, which did not possess it. In some instances objects

unknown to Nature were created by fresh combinations of old elements. This search for mastery of some sort is the simple explanation of later numberless mythologies which anticipated the historic religions, and it is always traceable in them. The division then established between the subjective and objective or the romantic and realistic types of thought, has proved permanent. Both types endeavored to interpret life, but the romanticist regarded it from the imaginative, and the realist from the metaphysical standpoint. Had those earlier peoples not felt the necessity for an escape from the ignominy of an unconditional surrender to impotence, they would not have invoked the supernatural. Nor should we too lightly esteem their beliefs, since by at least six primary methods they transformed reality in the alembic of the imagination and gave the world much valuable literature.

The first of these methods was that of crediting an existing power with some capacity in an impossible degree. The eyes of Jupiter were so keen that a single glance of his ran through Greece into Italy. Heimdal, the watchman of the gods, had such acute hearing that he caught the sound of the wool growing on a sheep's back. The saving grace of humor contained in this wonder is echoed in the remark of the American farmer that during the hot August nights one can hear the corn growing in the fields. The feet of Camilla were so swift that she ran on water without wetting them. The second method hastened or prolonged actual conditions by quickening or retarding the Time process. In this connection "Aladdin's Lamp" and "The Magic Carpet" illustrate a rapidity of realization no longer entirely foreign to human experience. Comparatively mod-

ern writers, most prominently Dean Swift, have made use of this general method. His horrible enormities, the "Strulldbrugs," were unable to die. In George Bernard Shaw's *Back to Methuselah*, human beings are endowed with the questionable advantages of longevity. Both authors indefinitely slowed up the natural course of events in behalf of dramatic emphasis. The third method credits objects with an ability to add to or take from their stature. *Alice in Wonderland* diminishes as she nibbles the miraculous mushroom of the story. In *The Food of The Gods*, by H. G. Wells, domestic fowls grow to be bigger than ostriches and then pick up full grown men with ease. Similarly, Voltaire's "Micromegas" was a giant many miles tall who could walk around the planet in thirty-six hours. Swift's "Lilliputians" are renowned for their tiny proportions and ridiculed for their insolent pretensions. The fourth method represents objects as having qualities absolutely beyond their scope. When Homer's hero Patroclus was killed in battle, his horses are said to have bowed their heads and wept bitterly. In not a few of these imagisms truth is topsy turvy, entirely logical yet absurd; and the moral drawn from them may be commendable, unworthy or even blasphemous. The genius they frequently exhibit may drift toward the "Happy Isles," or toward the rocks of raging obscenity. Yet how often genius is undeniably present, either as the handmaid of the noblest virtues or the paramour of monstrous passions and frightful self consciousness! The fifth method violates the laws of cause and effect. In fact, the whole scheme of mythology is largely based upon this violation. In the "Houyhnhnms" we have ra-

tional horses which conduct a model government that controls the bestial humans with dignified severity. Animals became men and men animals; substances marvelously interchanged their roles. After Ajax had slain himself of chagrin because the armor of Achilles was awarded to Ulysses his blood became a new kind of soil from which the larkspur springs, a fable resembling that of the story of the origin of the robin's red breast. Fresh from Olympus where the vengeful Zeus reigned, Prometheus stepped upon the earth with buoyant tread to bring to man the gift of fire which should overturn the rule of heaven. The sixth imaginative method mixes ingredients supplied by the known in forms unknown to reality. The monarch's cattle which had hoofs of brass; the golden manes of Neptune's horses; the physical attributes of the Satyr, the Sphinx, the Cyclops, the Gorgon and the Mermaid are creations of this sort.

Ruskin lit the "Seven Lamps of Architecture" to guide the steps of builders into the true path of structural good form. The hour has struck when someone should relight the numberless lamps of imagism to guide literature and art. Messes of printed garbage, seconded by tasteless or vulgar cartoons, are heaped upon us by the press. What will eventually become of the mind of a nation which daily devours such rubbish? We must, however, discriminate, since many journalists and artists continue to handle mythological subjects to good purpose. Recently in a New York newspaper Cupid was represented, not in the classic forms of innocence and gaiety symbolizing the emotion of young love, but with an ugly leer disfiguring his youthful face. A gangster's cap buries his golden

curls; the few arrows remaining in his quiver are broken; the bow has been thrown to the ground; in each tiny hand the little god clutches a smoking revolver. That decadent passion often ends in tragedy is the impressive lesson which lifts this cartoon above grotesqueness, and makes it more beneficial than many a sermon. It required a fertile and an artistic mind to unify old and new mental material with such startling force, and then give it a vivid setting which none can misunderstand.

My aim in briefly stating these methods is to indicate the manifold expansions of which imagination is capable compared with its relatively few limitations. Unless this difference is noted the psychology of our subject remains obscure. If one asks how best to employ these methods today, the tentative answer is that their highest use is the prerogative of that genius which is a law unto itself. There are also two types of genius: the first displays a keener sensibility than is shown by the ordinary run of men; the second, a higher degree of penetration. Wagner and Tolstoy are examples of the former type. They illuminate common experiences but do not make anything appreciably more profound of them. On the other hand, Newton and Darwin are representative of the second type who display a very high degree of penetration. Through their gift of imaginative insight as well as of perspective, the dim premonitions of the human mind take shape, become articulate, assume authority and revolutionize knowledge.<sup>2</sup> Yet no scientist, poet, artist or preacher can foretell the advent of those sudden inspirations which clothe their

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<sup>2</sup> Cf. *The Times Literary Supplement* (London), January 10, 1924.



output with power and charm. To say that the ideas thus generated are governed to some extent by definite laws may be mere conjecture. But it can be confidently asserted that imagination's processes retain their vitality only through continued contact with the senses. The world within and without you is itself a constant and exhaustless source of raw material, and it does not yet appear what other shapes it will take in the mills of the imagination. A ruined house, like the primrose on the river's bank, means nothing to those who having eyes do not see, and having ears do not hear. Nevertheless, it suggested to the poet Waller that

" . . . the soul's dark cottage, battered and decayed,  
Lies in new light through chinks that Time has made."

Likewise, our daily experiences are intended to fertilize mentality, to prick those who are intellectually alive into thinking, to stimulate imagination's more facile mastery of the environments of fact as well as of fancy.



## CHAPTER II

### THE WONDERS OF IMAGINATION

The creative power of imagination is seen in art, invention and economic work—The preacher is an artist on a large scale—Illustrations of the use of imagination in science and fiction—The business of preaching calls for amplified correlations only obtainable by the exercise of a sympathetic imagination—Such dependence is the secret and guarantee of the genuine vision and fruitful influence of the pulpit.

The subconscious or subliminal mind has vital relations with our operative intelligence, and frequently supplies its leading ideas. This unsupervised process indicates that the subconscious mind is doing some thinking for itself and that, when its findings are ready it is able to announce them. But the process affords no sanction for the contention that the best thinking is the result of passivity. Fruitful intellectualism depends upon preceding prodigal expenditure of mental energy. Whatever be the food he eats, no man can become an athlete by sitting still. By the same token arresting conceptions may be struck off like sparks, but they only flash upon minds which are at full tension. Words of will and power follow in the wake of silent hours of thought. To understand Plato, Sir Francis Bacon, Joseph Butler, Henri Bergson

or any other premier thinker, the preacher has to climb with them above the inquisitive crowds to the heights where thought merges into vision or intuition. The ascent demands strenuous yet willing exertion, without which neither spiritual insight nor adequate forms for its communication can be obtained. When Du Bois Reymond reminds us that he has had moments of involuntary illuminations, he hastens to add that none has a right to expect them immediately as the result of intermittent mental efforts. Though these experiences of incandescent thought seem to wait upon further research for their explanation, those who study them will find that nothing is more difficult, even for a mind familiar with the best literature, than to mint the images which rebuild the world of thought and action.<sup>1</sup>

The suggestion has already been made that the chief marvel of imagination is its creative power. Of course the term creative is used here in its secondary sense. Given the right materials to work with, the competent imagination proceeds to weave them into new combinations and forms. The outcome may be a philosophy, a sermon, a scientific theory, a mechanical contrivance, indeed almost everything else that can be named. What concerns us is the working of the mind in achieving this result. We have to do with male and female, good and evil, light and darkness, straight and curved, odd and even, or any other phenomena which fall under the profound principle of opposition which informs the world. Many of these opposites are not so diametrically opposed as they

<sup>1</sup>Cf. Théodule A. J. Ribot: *Essay on the Creative Imagination*, p. 208.

appear to be. Goethe held that a triangle has mystic significance, an idea harmonizing with the immemorial sanctity attributed to certain numerals. Mathematics has long enjoyed prestige in civilized countries, but only recently have we been told that it is an art. Its axioms, formerly announced as absolutes, existing independently, and therefore like inevitable musical phrases to be regarded as proof of a supersensible universe, are now declared the products of imagination. The declaration is measurably corroborated by the dependence of music, the most ethereal of all arts, upon mathematics.<sup>2</sup>

Certainly there is an identity of nature between the constructive imagination of the mechanic and that of the artist, the only difference being in the conditions, means and ends involved. In 1859 a volume was published in the United States of America, entitled *One Thousand Chances of Making Money*, by E. T. Freedley. In it he asks, "Why dip? Why not have pen and ink in one holder?" Here you have an imaginative idea arising out of the seemingly trivial hindrance of a dry ink well. The combination of two separate articles followed. Waste movements by the million are now avoided, and a very considerable benefit is conferred on all who write. An active brain plus executive skill and good salesmanship had created a new industry. This can serve as typical of the power of the imagination to start something practical and show it to be no more foreign to inspiration than the æsthetic. The history of inventions is a record of heroic figures who endured privation, persecution and

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<sup>2</sup> Cf. "Logical Atomism," by Bertrand Russell, in *Contemporary British Philosophy*, edited by J. H. Muirhead. First Series, p. 359 ff.

ruin; who fought to the bitter end against relatives and friends, upheld not by hope of gain, but by the sense of a mission to discharge, a destiny to fulfil, the fruit of the resistless impulse to create implanted in them by the imagination. What more or other than this impulse kept poets, artists or advocates of righteous causes up to their work? Shelley would have replied that there was a specifically divine inspiration for poets. The assertion that the inventor's mind moved on the same plane with that of the poet would have seemed presumptuous to him. But the psychological outlook takes a far wider outlook today than that of Shelley. It holds that the flame of genius ignites in the thinking of the engineer, the merchant and the artisan, as surely as it does in that of artists who produce masterpieces of painting or vivid portrayals of life.

It must be stipulated, however, that works of art retain the personal stamp of their authors more permanently than scientific products. Those who would know St. John or Dante must study them at first hand. Their numerous commentators do no more than introduce these authors to their readers. But the majority of intelligent men are acquainted with Newton's hypothesis of gravitation, though very few have read him. Nor is this necessary, since modern science incorporates into itself the whole contribution of preceding science. But no theology since St. John's time and no poetry since Dante's time have incorporated them. This subtle difference separates those master spirits who commune deeply with invisible realities from the rest of mankind. They range beyond logic, which makes no place for individuality, and bestow on us the triumphs of insight and vision retrieved by

them from extra-logical realms. *Hamlet* is one of the foremost examples of this kind. The hero of the play never actually existed, although Shakespeare enshrined his life in an immortal tragedy. Hamlet, like Job, doubtless has some shadowy counterpart in historical literature, but both characters were created by their respective authors. Shakespeare's drama is in itself a peerless exhibition of quite ordinary material amplified and illuminated by marvelous imagination. After scrutinizing the mental mosaic of Hamlet's varying attitudes to the characters that surrounded him, perhaps it may be possible to reduce his complex nature to simplicity. At any rate, this has been attempted by Dr. Ernest Jones in his *Essays in Applied Psychoanalysis*. Scores of minor character situations attend the out-working of the play, and aid in making it the classic of the English drama. To theologians and preachers it signally demonstrates the gains that may be derived from a faithful study of human life. It casts a searching light upon the hidden motives and consequences of conduct. The Bible is packed full of personalities, both simple and complex, which it limns in lines of fire, opening up their secrets to us with talismanic direction. The preacher who observes them with an absorbent mind will not fall short of the variety of treatment which some modern pulpits sorely need. The psychology of these Bible characters can be idealized, as was that of Hamlet, to the advantage of all concerned.

For the preacher is not a mere photographer of men and events; he is an artist who depicts humanity as a whole and in its relations to its Maker. Otherwise he plays traitor to his prophetic gift and



forfeits his influence upon his congregation. The novelist who repeats one or two striking plots, or delineates the same few characters over and over again, thereby reveals the poverty of his idealizing powers. The preacher who monotonously repeats a dozen cut and dried sermons is in precisely the same case. There is a decided moral tonic in any sustained effort to rise above threadbare ideas and descriptions, which are the bane of preaching, to those heights of artistry, suffused with universal nature, that have a lasting place in the heart of mankind. We are set apart as ministers of saving verities which should be made to shine like planets in the sky. Partisanship and exclusiveness, whether theological or ecclesiastical, mar the symmetry and strength of homiletics. Shakespeare so lived in and for his art as to give it a meaning for all ages to come. Of how many preachers can this be said? Are they at once ardent yet serene, just yet sympathetic, domestic yet catholic? Can they be angry without malice and charitable without weakness? If Dante laid himself open to accusations of partiality by consigning to hell the enemies of causes he held dear, how difficult it is for the preacher to shun outbreaks of personal animus all too thinly disguised as zeal for righteousness! Sermons in which one's vanities, fanaticisms and antipathies obtrude are seldom more than mischievous rantings. The audience speedily detects the pharisee beneath the garb of the prophet. He who subordinates his imagination to his prejudices serves few ends except those of uncharitableness and injustice. Religious bigots are prone to adopt this method of enlisting the image making power. Goldwin Smith once called attention to an Anglican novel in which one



of the characters who was a Roman Catholic was eaten alive by rats, while the Rationalist and the Republican representatives were slowly seethed in molten lead. The fate suffered by each of these victims, according to the author, was heaven's judgment on them because they dared to differ with him. His desperate condition is so patent as to make comment superfluous. Nothing less than a divine intervention would be required for its remedy.

## II

On the other hand, the comparatively few sermons which do not become fugitive literature abound in ideals of religious thought, hope and aspiration, and impart energy and purpose to human life. They have a healthy abandon to the spirit of truth which animates the realm of learning; to the spirit of reason which animates intelligent fellowship; to the spirit of law which regulates all phenomena; to the spirit of love which promotes human welfare. They share the qualities that marked the product of the creative imagination of the Italian Renaissance, the parent of Elizabethan Humanism. They answer with enthusiasm man's cry for intellectual and spiritual enlightenment. Some Homilies of Saint Chrysostom and the *Golden Grove Sermons* of Bishop Jeremy Taylor convince us that really great preaching, in which imagism is strong without rage, possesses the elements of permanence. Those who read them feel that,

" . . . . he who made us with such large discourse,  
Looking before and after, gave us not  
The capability of Godlike reason,  
To fust in us unused."

The ancients used this combination of qualities to good effect in the story of Laocoön, priest of Neptune in the ancient city of Troy, whose doom has given rise to numerous masterpieces of art. Who has not heard of the two serpents which came up out of the sea, coiled themselves around Laocoön and his children and strangled them to death? The tragedy is commemorated in the world famous sculpture of the Vatican. Lessing named his notable essay on artistic criticism after this priest of antiquity. Byron sings of this father's love and mortal agony in "Childe Harold," as,

". . . . the long envenomed chain  
Rivets the living links,—the enormous asp  
Enforces pang on pang, and stifles gasp on gasp."

Such strong original achievements create the vital atmosphere of poetry, painting, oratory and sculpture or ages to come. Puccini's *Madama Butterfly* is a modern dramatic instance of this reproductive work of the imagination. The episodes around which the popular opera circles may or may not have happened, but they are strictly true to human nature. Their literary treatment and musical setting, tremendous in pathos and in tragedy, serve only to rejuvenate existing material already threatening to grow old and bloodless. The serious consequences which so often attend marriages between persons of different races make it quite probable that the Japanese bride would be deprived of her child, and left to languish in a loneliness worse than death. Nevertheless, a real "Madama Butterfly" could not easily be found in Tokyo or Kobe. As an original character, however, she makes a poignant appeal to the womanhood of the world. Her story is

a memorable epic of the sacrificing, mothering impulse without which the race would be beggared indeed. The latent and active strength of the dramatic to put new life into human experiences is here so conspicuously displayed that the play may keep as firm a hold upon future artistries as the older masterpieces already named.

Scientific discoveries are dependent upon an imagination possessing long reach and grasp. The pure scientist, therefore, needs these attributes to an unusual degree. This assertion is upheld by the experience of Charles Darwin and Alfred Russell Wallace in their solutions of problems connected with the origin of planetary life. Neither of these distinguished men foresaw in advance the conclusions at which they arrived. The germinal idea of a progressive development inherent in Nature came simultaneously upon them with the suddenness of an intuition when they were thousands of miles apart. Recall what that idea has done and also undone in nearly every realm of human inquiry, and one is inclined toward Plato's axiom that such intuitions are reason's highest form. If their experience stood alone it might be deemed insufficient to establish spontaneousness as a trait of the creative imagination. But there have been others. The experiment upon which Metchnikoff rested his theory of microbes, called phagocytosis, to which he devoted twenty-five years of laborious research, "flashed across 'his' brain," instantaneously. Dr. Jacques Loeb, self-dedicated to a monastic seclusion by countless and arduous experiments, invaded in succession the fields of physiology, biology and psychology, pushing their frontiers into the unknown and upsetting many of their established

traditions. His disciples predict that his researches may yet do more than those of any contemporary scientist to change man's opinions of his place in the universe, and to hasten the final conquest of disease. Calvin S. Page, who was virtually unknown before his nomination for the Nobel Physics Prize of 1924, in his volume, *Rex, The Life Atom*, goes far beyond Einstein in revising the hypotheses of gravitation. Mr. Page maintains that sound is also light, and that the radio's vibration is super light. He caps the climax with the astounding statement that there is no such force as gravitation, and that the earth's inhabitants are held to its surface by repulsion emitted from other heavenly bodies. His speculation turns gravity inside out, and reminds us that scientists, no less than preachers, have visions which it is scarcely lawful for them to utter. The searchlight of luminous intellects directed upon patient and repeated experiments causes them to blaze with varied meanings like a flower bed in the beams of the morning sun. Given a large sense of reality, combined with a dominant imaginative grasp, what confines can be set for such intellects!

At the risk of repetition it must again be emphasized that all spontaneous gains of the imagination are interwoven with previous and cogent thinking upon carefully selected themes. When the moment for their delivery comes, the image making power is released, and the insight which justifies the pains of the process actually begins. The true philosopher never conjectures promiscuously. Every hypothesis he entertains has to be sharply conceived and strictly subordinated to the facts in question. Yet on these conditions it is not only excusable but necessary for him to snatch at the slightest semblance of any key

to a fresh general rule for a new grouping of particulars, by means of which the uniformity of truth can be advanced. Nor are these advances in higher knowledge made without exercising some boldness and even license in guessing. Theologians who surrender province after province of mysticism for the sake of a "scientific frontier" in the spiritual universe, should be admonished of their mistake by the methods of the scientists themselves.<sup>3</sup> In dealing with the physical universe science discards a thousand theories before it hits upon the right one. It proceeds from the known to the unknown in a way happily described by the late Professor Tyndall in his "Apology for the Belfast Address." He said: "I have sought to make clear that in physics the experiential incessantly leads to the ultra-experiential; that out of experience there always grows something finer than mere experience, and that in their different powers of ideal extension consists, for the most part, the difference between the great and the mediocre investigator."<sup>4</sup> Thus the kingdom of science comes not by observation and experiment alone. It depends for expansion upon speculations beyond observation and experiment and in a region inaccessible to both. In dealing with that region scientists are compelled to fall back upon the picturing power of the mind. Here as elsewhere faith is the evidence of things unseen. Of course observation and analysis are prerequisites for such synthesis,

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<sup>3</sup> Cf. Rufus M. Jones: *Studies in Mystical Religion*; E. Herman: *The Meaning and Value of Mysticism*; W. R. Inge: *Christian Mysticism*; W. E. Hocking: *The Meaning of God in Human Experience*; Evelyn Underhill: *The Mystics of the Church*.

<sup>4</sup> John Tyndall: *Fragments of Science*, p. 546. Cf. also his address on "Scientific Use of the Imagination," p. 423 ff.



but after they have done their utmost, it is the sympathetic imagination which constructively disposes everything they have accumulated, in ways that stand the tests of reason and availability.

### III

The novelist who exchanges speculation for certitude treads the same pioneering path which the artist and the scientist mark out for themselves. Kipling's ability to see and show abstract things in the concrete gives him the entrance to our emotions. His story, *The Night Mail*, written many years ago, describes with the verisimilitude which is his forte the details of an ocean trip undertaken by an airship propelled by a mysterious ray. Here creative imagination becomes predictive and foresees a future world controlled by an Air Board which will revolutionize human intercourse. The story is unique of its kind; yet it follows the usual order by first laying out the groundwork in accomplished facts, and then superimposing on them a new structure by means of the architectonic skill of the imagination. All writers of fiction should be judged by their ability to do this very thing. Although engaged with different cross sections of life, it is their common business to throw a glamor about the sections they select which shall invest them with unusual interest.

Here another potent element enters into the situation. The emotional quality of an object first enlists our attention and then incites investigation. It prompts us to invent theories which account for realities as they are experienced, or to pursue the well worn way of trial and error till we arrive at



warranted explanations. While this cogitation is going on various kindred speculations flit through the mind. A few which promise results are obtained and gradually assume perceptible outlines. An inevitable word for the poet, a majestic chord for the musician, a telling bit of dialogue for the novelist or a glimpse of the spiritual altitudes for the preacher; all of them arrive by this route. During these mental gestations, which Coleridge called "the shaping spirit of the imagination," the determining idea enters upon the scene; and often proves to be as much a surprise to the thinker as it is afterward a delight to others.

I have said enough to show that the imaginative power is not wholly explicable, and that it is largely recognizable indirectly in its effects. The observation is likewise true of all the intellectual factors. Their sequence would seem to be on this wise. First, our attention is called to things, persons or events possessing interest. Next, emotion intensifies that interest and stimulates the creation of various images. A concrete idea to be tested by experiment follows, and after this other ideas which we check up as best we can. The birth moment finally arrives of a determinant clue which is then subjected to further and specific tests. If these operations of the mind are successfully performed, the imagination casts its light upon the material thus accumulated and an acceptable interpretation is obtained.

In what sphere of life, then, at present, is the largest scope offered to imaginative activity? Whatever answer may be given, the truth in regard to this matter gravely concerns not only the Church Universal but all nations of the earth. There are signs in the arts of unusual eagerness to excel upon

the part of small groups, but there are no signs of any widespread movement animated by those ethereal or massive conceptions which sway the people at large, and plumb the depths of human life. Architecture is a consoling exception. In many of its branches both originality of design and a revival of historic models have begun to appear. From the standpoint of beauty and utility, domestic and public buildings have notably advanced during the past two decades. A survey of science will reveal an increasing number of highly educated men and women who are engaged in the reconstruction of the material universe. Compared with the quality and extent of the achievements of these scientists or with their intellectual intrepidity and the broad sweep of their main conceptions, the majority of artistic achievements today seem relatively lifeless, timid, petulant or sadly wanting in execution. The temper of our age is mechanistic rather than dynamic; and the atmosphere it has generated may account for much of the mediocrity shown in the fine arts. Whatever the explanation, to turn from the lassitude, the lamentations or the quarrels of artists to the buoyancy and coöperation of scientists, is like entering again into the refreshing vigor and optimism which characterized the Renaissance. It is seriously contended that men of science and of business are now our clearest and most serviceable thinkers. They reveal fewer limitations, less of the prejudice which is frequently more fatal to truth than is falsehood; far more vitality, courage and good sense than their contemporaries among the poets, preachers or artists. Complaints are made that politics also lacks the corrective of an informed imagination, as compared with the various move-

ments for social betterment. Mr. J. A. Spender insists that politicians only stand upon safe ground when they boldly apply the simple ideas of right and wrong to the affairs of communities and nations.<sup>5</sup> Public life sinks into meaninglessness and emptiness unless those who profess to serve it perceive the higher control which justice and truth eventually exercise over expediency and self-interest, and act accordingly. Meanwhile, for good or ill, the people are pathetically at the mercy of the politicians. In this particular age of the world they may lead us to the heights or plunge us to the depths. Yet politicians who do not plant themselves on the side of the eternal as against the temporal are as much out of place in their respective offices as an infidel in the Christian pulpit. For no political form is final, not even that of our democracy, unless it is rooted in the theocracy which exalts those unseen forces that are always making for righteousness. A spiritualized imagination spells all these differences and differentiates the politician from the statesman.

#### IV

A further question is in place here. Do churchmen show as high regard for the religious welfare of the world as men of science show for its material advantage, and men of trade for its commercial expansion? The reply at times would seem to be negative. Conscientious ministers who have awakened to a new sense of the tremendous forces with which they are dealing will distinguish, with Principal Jacks, between the civilization of culture

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<sup>5</sup> J. A. Spender: *The Public Life*, Vol. II, p. 155 ff.

and the civilization of power.<sup>6</sup> They will not speak of war or of peace as they might have done ten years ago. They will carefully refrain from harangues addressed to a feverish and static nationalism, or to the jealousies and rivalries of antagonistic groups and States. They will not be guilty of the intellectual bravado which sets theological boundaries to the possibilities of the Christian religion. Nor will they presume that its prosperity is bound up in their doctrinal schemes. They will remember the manifold races and histories of mankind; their helps, hindrances, habits, beliefs and forms of worship. They will see for themselves and make plain to others the greatness and the littleness of man, and endeavor to match the more profound mysteries of godliness against those of iniquity. Sum up the apparent success of evil, the prevalence of devastating forms of idolatry and corruption, the dreary fanaticisms and hopeless secularisms that blight much life of today. Truly they make a vision of our world calculated to stagger and appall. Notwithstanding, one recollects that Christianity began with nothing less than the apocalyptic vision of this same sinful, degraded world redeemed and even glorified. The New Testament Faith emerged from the immense range of Israel's Ecclesia and nourished itself on her prophetic literature. It also inherited much cultural wealth from classic Paganism. Does the average clergyman, summoned as he is to the holiest of all vocations, have these priceless heritages before his mind, apply them to his soul's growth and to the enlargement of his ministry? Or does he, for sheer want of imagi-

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<sup>6</sup> L. P. Jacks: *A Living Universe*, p. 61 ff.

nation, cling desperately to a few conceptions of sacred truths which have been so long in circulation that they need to be reminted in the Treasury of God?

I unhesitatingly avow that the secret of power in Christian preaching, the spell by which it finds its way into the hidden chambers of the heart, is a sympathetic imagination. This gift alone maps out the high road to proficiency for the preacher. It enables him to penetrate the thoughts and feelings of others, that he may bring to bear upon them the spiritualities which it visualizes. It ought not to be said of us that while science steadily reclaims large tracts of territory from the unknown and the debatable and places them at man's service, theology retreats behind its venerable breastworks and there digs in. If organized research can constantly bring within the sphere of law beneficial things formerly ascribed to the supernatural, surely ministers of the Gospel must not become laggards in a field presumably their own. Fictitious fences between science and religion are rapidly broken down today because men's ideas of the intelligent nature of causation have expanded.<sup>7</sup> Not a few of the controversies upon which the Church wastes valuable time and strength are superfluous because the facts that settle the issues are commonly known to scholars. Their acceptance by believers ought not to be rendered too costly by love of debate. Nor should religious imagination turn a deaf ear when summoned by humanity's undeniable experiences to nobler interpretations of God's limitless universe.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. J. Arthur Thomson: *Science and Religion*; Shailer Mathews (Editor): *Contributions of Science to Religion*; Joseph Needham (Editor): *Science, Religion and Reality*; James Y. Simpson: *Landmarks in the Struggle Between Science and Religion*.



On May 22, 1923, Dr. Cutler and Dr. Levine operated upon a beating human heart. Every step of the operation had been mapped out in advance, and the diagnosis was vindicated by its success. There are infinitely more difficult operations than this, however, connected with the regeneration of souls and committed to those who profess to be skilled in spiritual surgery. They do not have to rely upon guess work any more than did the two eminent surgeons named. Behind the preacher's advocacy of the Evangel of Christ are exhaustless energies responsive to the uses to which his intellectual grasp and moral vision may put them. Those energies once rooted out embedded barbarisms and civilized great societies by communicating to them their typical moral and religious ambitions. They have not weakened an iota in their original force or volume, but they may be neutralized by standardized methods of thought and expression which exile us from their higher imaginative treatment. Beneath the microscope we learn that the diamond is a veritable cosmos, consisting of subordinate and solar-like systems beautifully arranged. Enclosed within the hardest of these minute sparkling crystals are cathedral-like spaces, lit by blazing chandeliers which emit panoramic changes of light and color. The infinitesimal particles which compose the stone behave like dancers on a ballroom floor, choosing congenial and repelling uncongenial partners. In this tiny structure the number of electrons revolving at a fabulous speed in their respective orbits is calculated by billions. Sublime as is the poetry of Creation in the Genesis document, it may well be read again in the light of these latest revelations of science.



One does not have to labor the point. It should be gratifying to reflective minds that legitimate imagination can, if needs be, rewrite Christian theology upon the basis of its accepted facts and experiences. Another piece of good news is its ability to make preaching a joyous inspiration for preachers and hearers alike. Artists, scientists, materialists, utilitarians and all sorts and conditions of men have but to feel the transforming touch of the preaching mind which lives in and transmits the eternities to sign up as its allies. By such treatments of the Gospel the minister ceases to skirt around it and moves into its redeeming center. He is made aware that regeneration is of the inner man, for which reason it succeeds after everything else in the form of a philosophy of life has been tried in vain. The Sophism calculated for exigencies of the moment, the Hedonism related to sensual pleasures, the Skepticism which rejects religious certitude, the Platonism which discards the weak and unfit, the Stoicism which sets up the iron rule of necessity and abdicates the throne of freedom, are all products of imagination. And they have all failed. If Aryan culture is not to collapse within the next eighty years, as Oswald Spengler predicts it will, no church, however powerful, is safe or wise to reckon much upon anything else except Christ's Evangel, so imaged by His servants as to be once more made good news for all people. Spengler attributes the approaching collapse of the existing order to the decrepitude of age. He asserts that our children's children will witness in it another of those recurrent, reverse cyclic movements which sweep out of existence everything their fathers loved. According to him there is no unavoidable forward march

in history; and our civilization is but one in the checkered drama of the life of the race. Since it has become senile it must presently vanish. His synthesis of the manifold data embraced in his conclusion is brilliant but hard, at times obviously inaccurate, and again, dependent upon forced parallels or misleading generalizations. Yet if a vote were taken among the leading thinkers of Europe on the proposition that Aryan culture is today headed for destruction, in all probability the ayes would have it.

All we get for our pains here is a most unlovely leanness of judgment deflected by unfaith and prostrated by despair. A wholesome rebellion against such monstrous reasonings is afoot, which tends toward a stalwart confidence that the inclusion of all life under one divine rule is the better warranted synthesis. In it there are no neutral spaces left for theologians to monopolize any more than for philosophers, scientists or statesmen. Spheres of political suzerainty, profits of industry, fruits of learning, deeds of diplomacy, measures of peace and war, doctrines of religion, as well as matters of private conduct, all are subject to the universal sway of this competent oversight. No pursuit nor pleasure can rationally demur over being included or claim exemption from its dominion, so long as the universal well-being hangs upon the impartial enforcement of an omniscient rule. Clergymen will find nothing new in it as a fact, however widely they may differ in their methods of expressing it. They are accustomed to contend that nothing in human life is either unmoral or nonmoral. But they cannot drive home the contention to the hearts and consciences of their generation, unless they themselves live a

full life which enlarges their personal experience on every side.

Preachers who draw back on the threshold of novel sensations, emotions and ideas, because they are afraid of the tides of life at their modern crest, are often unimpressive in their presentations of religion. Their sermons are foreordained to dull routine and flabbiness. They cannot speak the quickening word nor set before the people with compelling power those conceptions which constitute Christianity's essence. But let them decide to venture forth on heretofore untried ways with God in the name of Christ who came that man might have life and have it more abundantly. Then the pulpit will become surcharged with vitality, its intellectual appetite keen, its moral insight sure, its vision of the unseen reliable. Joseph Conrad eagerly desired a word with which he could move the world. When he found it in a language to which he was not born he used it to good effect. But how does his quest compare with that which every preacher must make his own? "Open thou mine eyes," prayed the Psalmist, "that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law." Had he been able to draw upon the knowledge of psychology as a science, he might have asked for the purification and enlightenment of his imagination. For imagination thus purified and enlightened cannot be diverted into the disastrous floods of sour cant round about us. It will put any man's pulpit at the farthest remove from the narrowness and rancor which pass muster with the witless for pious thinking. Such a pulpit finds its accessories in the Gospels, Epistles, Prophecies and Statutes of the Bible. His rightful use of these oracles links the humblest

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divine of today with every former Ambassador of God. No fiction, however entrancing, equals the romance of the sacred literature imaginatively interpreted. The pulsating force of the image making power, so guided and controlled, puts new life into the prosaic and offers the soul of man its rarest opportunities for growth and service.

The breadth, color, diversity and discrimination characteristic of the best preaching constitute an open rebuke to those superficial pronouncements of the pulpit, which have hardened the hearts and parched the sympathies of countless men and women. Such preaching is animated by a paramount passion for life in all its divine sources and in all its human forms; a passion which strikes off sparks from the imagination as flint from steel. Its possessor reaps the harvest of a quiet eye which looks at everything long enough to retain the exact image of its actual outlines. Thus to really see the most commonplace sights and express their true quality is originality. Those who have enjoyed this high privilege obtained it by scrupulous attention to everyday occurrences.<sup>8</sup> Literary artists feed imagination and invoke beauty by prolonged observation of ordinary existence in which miracles are concealed. The realm of nature confronts the imagination with challenging hills and tranquil valleys, the sun's rising and setting, sentinel stars and all the limitless panorama on which they shine. In the realm of humanity what scope it finds for pathos, pity, humor, laughter and the anger which is not sin! These varied sources furnish material

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<sup>8</sup> In the preface to *Pierre et Jean*, De Maupassant relates at length how Flaubert interested him in the art of *seeing* things in order to find the word that expresses the thing seen.

which it develops into most fascinating visions of the best. Nor has there ever been so much to arouse curiosity and provoke thought since the New World was discovered by Columbus. The retrospective survey of our era, three centuries hence, will stir the blood of our descendants like a trumpet's peal. Already strange and enchanting environments are surrounding us. Not more than fifty years will pass before much that is now in good standing will have vanished and much else will have been renewed.

Why should not the Church lead in the consolidation of this mind which is in the making; fine compound that it is of nervous force and originality? Why should not her fostering care cause it to exceed all present anticipations and yet remain real? If it is to be touched to eternal issues she should certainly prove indispensable, since people are not naturally progressive, and the creative few have to spur on the unwilling many. In any case, the preacher who treats men and events in the large free manner I have described will have his audience anywhere and at all seasons. Although ignorance and fear dog the footsteps of the multitudes, as a rule they will throw away their mouldy traditions once the ministry of assured knowledge has won their confidence. Wordsworth sets this issue in a large context with the artistry of words. He reaches conclusions through the creative imagination in consonance with those of the best philosophy.<sup>9</sup> The mind immersed in "wise passiveness," the heart that "watches and receives"; the "serene and blessed mood in which the affections gently lead us on," give us the "eye made quiet by the power of har-

<sup>9</sup> Cf. James Robertson Cameron: *The Renascence of Jesus*, p. 61 ff.



mony and the deep power of joy," whereby "we see into the life of things." The teachings of the Laureate in "Tintern Abbey," and in his other poems, that everything is to be seen in the light of "the visionary power," finds fullest expression in "The Prelude." This is not only his confessional as a poet, but it might also be regarded as a breviary for preachers. Its conclusion is:

" . . . By love subsists  
All lasting grandeur, by pervading love;  
That gone, we are as dust."

Yet it should be noted that even this love is insufficient, unless hallowed by a still higher love.

" . . . love that breathes not without awe;  
Love that adores, but on the knees of prayer,  
By heaven inspired; that frees from chains the soul,  
Lifted, in union with the purest, best,  
Of earth-born passions, on the wings of praise  
Bearing a tribute to the Almighty's Throne."

Moreover this pure and reverent passion can neither be nor act

"Without Imagination, which, in truth,  
Is but another name for absolute power  
And clearest insight, amplitude of mind,  
And Reason in her most exalted mood." <sup>10</sup>

The poet thus illuminates what one means by "seeing life"; not the sordid and the vile, but God's good world, the better for its contrast with an evil side; not half the world, but all of it, with the bad in the process of redemption by the good. Herein is imagination's wisdom justified. It assigns su-

<sup>10</sup> "The Prelude," Bk. XIV.



premacy to moral law and exalts virtue above genius, principle above policy, manners above music, life above literature. Do we not need to clarify our confused ideas and steady our wavering standards in these perilous times, which ever and anon remind one of the closing years of the Roman Empire? As a Shropshire lad I recall an old castle, often seen by me in the lingering twilight of the Welsh border, whose gray and crumbling walls are associated with the imperishable glory of a great poet. Of Milton's masque of *Comus*, first enacted within that Norman fortress of Ludlow, Professor Winchester declares that it surpassed everything that had been heard since the voice of Shakespeare grew silent twenty years before; and in fact nothing so beautiful has ever been heard in England since.<sup>11</sup> For that play was the last outburst of resonant Elizabethan music, while it also contained enchanting strains of sedate sweetness and fastidious purity entirely its own. The concluding lines of this masque sum up all, and more than all, that I have tried to say in this lecture. They should be at once a prophecy and a benediction for us.

"Mortals, that would follow me,  
Love Virtue; she alone is free.  
She can teach ye how to climb  
Higher than the sphery clime  
Or, if Virtue feeble were,  
Heaven itself would stoop to her."<sup>12</sup>

<sup>11</sup> Cf. C. T. Winchester: *An Old Castle and Other Essays*, p. 33.

<sup>12</sup> Milton: *Comus*, line 1018 ff.

## CHAPTER III

### THE PERILS OF IMAGINATION

Day dreaming—The evils of ecclesiastical controversies and of over-emphasized sectarianisms—Conflict of science and religion due to unbalanced imagination—Excess of imagination in writers and preachers—Darker phases and perversions of imagination—Degenerate purveying of obscenity by masters of the literary craft—Psychoanalysis and sex obsessions—Instances of debauched and of refined imagism.

I have stated that imagination possesses the power to evoke the prophetically new from material which is familiarly old. Since it is practically ubiquitous in range and includes dominion over the physical senses, it is patent that more or less serious risks attend its exercise. These perversions descend in the order of their gravity from unwarranted indulgences in imagism to foul depths of its abuse; the work of misguided or malignant spirits who exceed all bounds in the practice of their creeds of license and turpitude.

Day dreaming is one of the lesser of the harmful forms of image making which should not be summarily condemned. When supplemented by honest effort, its net results are often commendable. There are few more striking examples of its remunerative exuberance than that supplied by the experience of

Warren Hastings, the first Governor General of India. As a lad he lived neighbor to his lost ancestral estate of Daylesford Manor. As he wandered in its woods and meadows he dreamed of its restoration to his family by himself. His dream persisted and led him from Daylesford to India, where it was realized only after his prolonged and arduous sojourn there as the greatest Viceroy of the British Raj. Similar day dreaming congenital to adolescence is justified as often as it furnishes like incentives to intelligent activity. A college student, deficient in the craftsmanship of the pen, writes books in his spells of day dreaming with the greatest facility. Those fancies may become a differential in his life, since some of the finest literature we possess originated in just such forecasts of youthful imagination.

From first to last, however, day dreaming needs to steer between the extremes of expression and repression. If such a balance is not struck, the habit of persistent dissatisfaction with life is prone to develop. Certain sanguine temperaments whose chance for obtaining wealth or fame is exceedingly remote are sometimes subjected to delusions about themselves. One of these victims may luxuriate in visions of untold riches and of the things they will place at his disposal. Another fancies all doors flying open at his approach and hears the crowds hail his name in accents of adulation. A third pictures himself on his travels crossing sea and land with pomp and circumstance; he supposes that his talents outvie every demand made upon them and *Monte Cristo* perchance is his favorite novel. What harm can there be in these youthful romancings which are frequently fostered by mid-

dle-aged visionaries? Some of them, as we may learn from Varendonck's treatise on the subject, have served as fruitful hints in the work of actual investigation. Yet the tendency can drift into a debilitating habit, and in its advanced stages is properly classified as a mental disease. Our loquacious and attractive friend "Mr. Micawber" has doubtless contributed to the gaiety of nations, but he did it at the expense of his personal integrity and of the purses of his friends. He was an adept in amiability and optimism, and also in the clever evasion of his obligations. But many a less likable individual spends shiftless hours watching his shadowy double, entranced with the tempting vagaries of the day dreaming mind. The contrast between the prizes which they win in fancy and the blanks they draw in real life frequently makes men and women reckless, seducing their wills and corrupting their consciences. Achan saw, then he coveted, and when the opportune moment came, moral scruples went by the board, and he took what was not his own.<sup>1</sup> Unregulated desires of this sort have a knack of getting round the protests of fidelity and honor. The inner workings of the criminal brain, as exposed by competent authorities, show it to be the rule rather than the exception that deceitful imaginings have paved the felon's path to the prison door.

Another exhibition of perverse imagination due to lack of balance is supplied by Christianity's theological and ecclesiastical controversies. The few instances in which principles beyond the reach of compromise have been at stake deserve no blame and require no defense. Yet how often have po-

<sup>1</sup> Joshua vii. 16 ff.

lemics become so acrimonious as to obscure the grace and loveliness of the Christian religion! Our Faith should not be primarily regarded as a philosophy but as the living experience of God by believing men and women, evoking their finest energies in sacrificial love towards their fellow creatures. It rises above earthly changes, conflicting ordinances and doctrines, to recreate the man in men and make them conscious that they stand heart to heart with their Redeemer, and must do unto others as they would have others do unto them. The interminable disputes of churchmen have more frequently contradicted in spirit the essentials they profess to uphold.<sup>2</sup> This policy of intellectual rigor rather than of spiritual wisdom explains the schism that split the Mediæval Church and shattered its rule in the West. The implacable logic of events hardened in those who survived the fray, and other divisions followed. In the sequel of mingled good and evil what was taken from priests was frequently given to princes. Nationalism thus arose to its present consequence as the concrete result of the unlicensed imagination which portrayed the State as an end in itself, often to the exclusion of the moral rights of humanity. Edicts were issued, confined in conception and in range of sympathy, which robbed religion of its native breadth and variety, and effected a divorce between ethics and æsthetics. The poets eventually lost their purity and the precisians their poetry. Hierarchical assumptions were confronted by a rampant individualism which identified divine ordinances with its private opinions. Purists, legalists and formalists thrived apace; each group unre-

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<sup>2</sup> Cf. Francis Greenwood Peabody: *The Church of the Spirit*, p. 31 ff.



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servedly committed to its specific dogmas and unable to perceive the merits of those of any other group. The ecclesiastical arenas, clouded by the smoke of battle, brought questionable gains to the victors, and the losses to real religion were enormous.<sup>3</sup>

The sectarianism that weakens Christianity to this hour is also largely traceable to the dearth of imagination. Its intense provincialism continues to multiply barriers which shut out far more than they enclose. Beliefs that were formerly the living products of free progressive minds have either ossified or been outlawed by advancing knowledge. No constructive thinker, baptized in the grace of the Eternal Spirit, has appeared in our time to breathe order into this chaos, or to make the Church truly Catholic and her theology truly Christian. When he does appear, as he will, he must have the magnanimity of soul and the comprehensive outlook upon life which certify his possession of a powerful and an equitable imagination. His mission will be to so invigorate and enlarge the areas of sacred learning that ample room may be found in them for science and religion as complementary to each other.

Meanwhile humanity owes something to those indirect courses by which its seekers have endeavored to find truth. Their conceptions, though imperfect, have often pointed the way to fruitful conclusions that proved to be the substance of which they were the shadow. No one can review the lack of disciplined imagination in religious affairs without observing that it was largely due either to belief

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<sup>3</sup> Cf. the author's *Christianity and the State*, p. 229 ff.



in freedom as an essential good or to dread of freedom as a dangerous innovation. These polar instincts meet everywhere in ceaseless antagonism, and both will have to be taken into account for the equipoise of thought and statement now so needful. We should also stress the fact that obedience is the first lesson in social progress, and that the mind moulded by submission to lawful authority must continue if civilization is not to be wrecked. To insure the beneficial results of a trained and informed imagination, it is further necessary to rediscover and restate the spirit and the genius of those ancient peoples who were masters of symbolism and of pictorial description. Although their ways of thought and expression seem strange, the quest is profitably renewable in every generation, since the latest present problems are always casting fresh light upon the past. We require, as Professor W. G. de Burgh avers, "a guide to the best thought of antiquity on man and his relations to the world and God."<sup>4</sup>

## II

Churchmen, theologians and preachers are not alone guilty of mistakes due to an unbalanced imagination. Philosophers and scientists who reject idealism find themselves involved in equally disastrous difficulties. They deny the existence of a personal Deity, discount the evidence of Divine Providence, discard the idea of any dependence of the natural order upon the Supreme Will and view belief in immortality as a sheer delusion. Mr. Bertrand Russell, who always has the courage of his

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<sup>4</sup> His own book, *The Legacy of the Ancient World*, admirably furnishes such guidance.

convictions, declares that life has no other outcome but extinction. Despite the fact that his evaluations spell evisceration, he is very sure of himself, and not less sure of happiness, even though it is extremely negative. Any attempt to predicate purpose in Creation is resented by him because the idea implies that the universe is comprehensible. To say that there is such a purpose and that it is reciprocated in that perfected humanity whose advent is the hope of Christian minds is to draw down to one's self the unmitigated contempt of the skeptical. We get the idea of a comprehensible purpose in the universe from the consciousness of purpose in our own personality. The companion idea that it is related to the divine personality is derived from an ineradicable certainty of kinship between ourselves and God. This is to say that personality as visualized by Christian imagination is one and the same thing.<sup>5</sup>

One can only touch upon these matters in passing. Yet the opinion is ventured that if science had been as hospitable in its appreciation of spiritual as it is of natural phenomena, much of the futile bickering between organized knowledge and faith might have been avoided. Their antagonism is mainly factitious, fabricated either by religionists who confuse theology with religion, or by scientists who forget that science deals solely with material things. Yet religion and science have lived and will always live by the certainty of their ideas. Nor are these ideas "such stuff as dreams are made of." They are sterling convictions which have purified the

<sup>5</sup> Cf. S. A. McDowall: "The Possibility of Purpose" in *The Modern Churchman*, September, 1924, p. 255 ff.; E. S. Brightman: *An Introduction to Philosophy*, p. 166 ff.

imagination of peoples, transformed the ideals of civilized States and decreed their respective policies in the world. Institutional and theological forms of faith have suffered from the imperfections incidental to every human development. But the verities they express deserve better treatment than flouts, gibes and sneers from those who boast their allegiance to reality. However distorted or misapplied the spiritual forces are which have kindled the loftiest aspirations of the race, they cannot be dismissed from our consideration by scientific scholars who endeavor to enthrone their theorizings as a philosophy for the whole of life.<sup>6</sup>

Even so great a mind as Huxley's revealed in this respect a structural weakness. His mental processes show little if any affinity with the religious meaning of the universe. Skepticism was inherent with him and it impoverished much of his finest thinking. Nevertheless, his value to his own and after generations was large and various. He bravely contended for the intellectual freedom which all inquiry must have to prosper. He knew better than any other scientist of his day the complex ramifications of natural knowledge. His original contributions to biology were numerous and diversified. By retabulating the classification of organisms he gave renewed interest to the facts of anatomy. Experts alone can correctly estimate the benefits of his prodigious labors. Intellectual courage and moral integrity were his outstanding virtues. His absolute loyalty to truth, as he apprehended it, made the slightest equivocation intolerable to him. He drove

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<sup>6</sup> Cf. A. N. Whitehead: *Science and the Modern World*, pp. 193 ff, 252 ff.

the dagger of his doubts through the heart of the most popular conceptions if he believed them to be erroneous. The fear of man was unknown to him. He came to his office as the foresworn interpreter of Nature in the High Court of Reason, with a scorn for personal consequence. But when he approached the question of a personal Deity who decides the destiny of the universe and of man, Huxley was seized with what for him was a surprising timidity. He accentuated his obliquity of vision by giving it the name of agnosticism. Concerning the ultimate goal of the cosmos he held that every process of Nature implies the final cessation of all change, culminating in universal death. According to his theory, evolution permits no millennial dreams. The brave imagination which enabled him to mark the upward road of Creation to its very summit faltered at that point. He could not visualize, with Le Conte, an increasingly beautiful universe pursuing its ageless course with a manifest sense of direction and finally vindicated in the immortality of a redeemed race.<sup>7</sup>

### III

Another and obvious peril of imagination consists in its excessive use. Those who constantly speak under public pressure should guard against this peril. It is a serious drawback to much otherwise excellent work by ministers who would romance less if they knew more, or else would frame their images with a truer sense of proportion. It runs to profuse ornamentation and produces those

<sup>7</sup> Cf. the author's *Charles Darwin and Other English Thinkers*, p. 47 ff.

sermons whose extravagant rhetoric tires intelligent hearers. The prodigal use of tropes and similes detracts from the significance and strength of the pulpit. In this connection it should be said that the use of mystical metaphors which obliterate the plain sense of Scripture must be avoided. For many centuries followers of the Alexandrian School of allegorical exegesis have injected into every text, esoteric meanings which were regarded as infinitely better than the historical interpretation. These far-fetched fancies are rivalled only by those of the rabbinical expositions of the old Testament.

Imagination running wild has also created phantom substitutes for the historic Jesus, who is worshiped by the Church as the Christ of God and the Saviour of mankind. Renan's *Vie de Jesus*, although not his finest work, is an extraordinary book, and illustrates the abuse in question. A scholar of immense erudition and intellectual brilliance and a writer of distinction, Renan was also above ungenerous or petty criticisms. With felicity and vividness he paints the majestic outlines of Christ's character. But he forces their convergence upon an imaginary focus, because he is convinced that the supernatural is a false dream, and therefore superfluous as an explanation of the Nature of our Lord and His mission for mankind. To be sure, Renan shows a reverent solicitude in investing the sublime figure of Jesus with dignity, purpose and power. But he strips it of the more seemly robes with which centuries of faith and experience have clothed it. His portrait suggests a magnified composite of Humanity, rather than the native strength and loveliness of the Divine Man Himself. The imitators of Renan who have since appeared fall



far below the standard he set up. Some of them analyze to nothingness the outstanding ideals and facts of the Personality they attempt to portray. Their constant resort to hypothesis, conjecture and emendation shows the straits to which they are put. Notwithstanding numerous gleams of insight, often tinged with credulity or even vulgarity, the living and redeeming Christ, known and adored by the Church throughout the world, is not found beneath their rhetorical draperies.<sup>8</sup>

There are preachers who emphasize poetical moods and musical phrases rather than the pith of their theme. Art is their chief concern; form rather than substance prevails in their type of ministry. Others seldom verify their symbols and allegories by experience, or compare them with facts. Still others are indifferent to the discoveries which now amaze mankind. Such advocates of religion who simply embellish a few selected moralities can never be its guiding minds. Although they gain recognition as verbal artists, their pictorial gifts often prove a snare, and expose their authors to the charge of jugglery and to the reproach that their use of imagination is decorative rather than creative. Preachers who have much in common as stylists with poets and essayists may win the good will of their hearers but not their intellectual assent. We are indebted to them for dainty phrases, cunningly woven. But they are comparatively uninfluential even with the many who are attracted by good poetry or good preaching.

Who reads Edmund Spenser today? Yet he was eulogized by Milton, Cowley, Pope, Keats and

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<sup>8</sup> Cf. R. H. Hutton: *Theological Essays*, p. 291 ff.



Wordsworth. Had he lived in the open, as did some of his contemporaries, and sung with them of the New World in the then fabulous West, or of the marvelous beginnings of the modern era which he was witnessing, his hold upon immortality would have been surer than it is. Spenser's apparent incapacity to appropriate and incorporate in his poetry the epoch-making events around him has led the critics to think of him as a fabricator of the exquisite rather than an interpreter of the actual. Shelley, on the other hand, was upborne to rhapsody by his teeming ethereal fancies. Compact of pure imagination, he incarnated that spirit of the imponderable which elevates the sublime, heeds little save the emotions, revels in intimations which seemingly have no counterpart among visible things. He is an object lesson to the devotees of mysticism that if religion needs protection against what the Apostle denounced as "the beggarly elements of the world," it has also to be delivered from the destitution inflicted upon it by its dissolution into fluttering shadows, faint echoes, distant dreams and illusive hints.<sup>9</sup>

Ultra-refined theories or distilled abstractions, expressed in intoxicated imagisms, cannot grapple with life's actual realities. Superlative idealizations unsustained by adequate thought resemble an infantry attack in modern warfare, unsupported by an effective barrage of heavy artillery. They remind us of what a French officer said about the Charge of the Light Brigade at Balaklava: "Magnificent, but it is not war!" If the objection is raised that the ideal is often the true, the answer

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<sup>9</sup> Cf. R. S. Garnett (Editor): *Letters about Shelley*.

is that the contrast proper to the ideal is never with the true, *but with what is actual*. Congregations are aware of this, since they react slowly or not at all to discourse which has no perceptible connections with actuality. To be sure, it is only in the glowing enthusiasm of the preacher that ideals become possible. Seeing visions and dreaming dreams, the orator kindles, the artist paints, the poet sings. Yet if their performances are vague and impalpable, they are beyond the plain person's apprehension. He has no desire to put the use of imagination's beating pinions under the ban, but he demands that in their flights they shall retrieve for him inspirational counsels which are not ambiguous. He insists that the preacher who would capture him must be definite in his statements. Sermons so far-fetched as to be foreign to the common mind, their relations to actual experiences so few because of their propensity for attenuated speculations, should remain undelivered until they can be translated into the speech of the market place. The preacher's raptures and dreams are advantageous only in so far as they enable him to lay upon his hearers' hearts their lowliest duties.

Christianity is the Religion of the Real. Its transcendentalisms are checked and informed at every stage by its zeal for humanity and its insistence upon conduct as the acid test of every spiritual claim. Its boldest excursions into the invisible are justified by its revelation of those laws and principles which regulate the details of righteous living. Other-worldliness can endure the taunt that it is opalescent nonsense so long as it is of the kind that produces the fruits of godliness in this world. Such was the distinctive note in William Blake's

idealism, which notwithstanding its repudiation of every rational system, grows increasingly influential with the passing of the years. While we know little enough of Blake, what knowledge we have reveals him to us as a thinker, a poet and a seer. Nor is he so much an example of excessive imagination as of its complete, albeit most mystical, embodiment. Like St. Paul, he had his vision which he trusted implicitly, and to which he was loyal. He would not admit that his writings were fables or allegories. To him they were reports of an actual faculty called *Vision* which was bestowed on him to restore the Golden Age of the Ancients. What he saw with "the eyes of his heart" was elaborated by the ethereal energies of his intellect. He delighted in giving a local habitation and a name to the weird or gorgeous insights of a creative perception which he followed as an infallible guide. No reasonings, though they seemed to reach the point of demonstration, could make headway against his confidence in his decisive, triumphant and intimate experiences.<sup>10</sup>

We may learn the secret of Christianity's spread from this imaginative genius. Vital experiences similar to Blake's are the effective minister's mainstay. His intimate and illuminating knowledge of God as Father, of Christ as Mediator and of the filial relation of every human soul to God through Christ, is the citadel of his power. The weakness of numerous pulpits is explained by the absence of this direct and immediate knowledge. If the preacher cannot personally estimate Christianity

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<sup>10</sup> Cf. Walter Raleigh: *Some Authors*, p. 251 ff.; Paul Elmer More: *Shelburne Essays*, Fourth Series, p. 212 ff.; Harold Bruce: *William Blake in This World*.

but must depend on preconceived theories, he will not be able forcibly to present its claims to others. When his hour of crisis comes, as it does every Lord's Day, he will make haste to escape from himself and to take refuge in doctrines advanced upon authority or buttressed by tradition, because the saving word is not in him. Strategy of this sort may suffice for earthly affairs, but it furnishes no such spiritual scope and drive as his situation requires. On the other hand, many unlettered men of the pulpit, conscious of their sources of supply, have laid hold on the invisible by realizing faith, and through it have won astounding triumphs for the Gospel. The earlier Franciscans and Wesley's Itinerants overcame formidable obstacles in themselves and in others because the elemental Evangel was as bright to them as the noonday sun. United with it by a double tie they heralded it from the depths of an intense personal experience which commandeered the imagination. They would not have understood any explanation that diluted the grace and glory of a revelation which had recreated them. Perhaps, like Blake, they were not without their illusions; yet like him they lived in the Kingdom of the Spirit. Access to that Kingdom is obtained once the imagination has kindled in the preacher's soul a consciousness aflame with God's presence. His inspirational mind is not a vacuum; it has many treasures to draw upon from the hidden man of the heart which neither learning nor formulas can of themselves impart.

#### IV

Here we draw near the descent already mentioned into imagination's darker activities. Little

that is novel is to be found in them but much that could be wiped out for ever with inestimable advantage to mankind. The journey down grade begins in an egotism capable of a thousand devices that torment their possessors and frequently corrupt society. This ulterior interest in self prompts the desire to forego every propriety so long as one's personality and opinions luxuriate in the limelight. Charles Baudelaire sedulously cultivated his preposterous egotism in order to surprise his fellows. An unabashed victim of vanity, he studied to be different from everybody else. Believing that conspicuousness was due to his self-importance, he strove to maintain this conceit. For him success lay in eccentricity and he cherished an ill-concealed hatred for the normal in men and things. The discipline of a balanced social imagination, requiring him to practice the ethic of reverence for all life, never troubled his idiosyncracies. Nor did he perceive that this ethic was distinctively that of Jesus. Philosophically expressed and universally extended, it has become an intellectual and moral necessity for the peace and stability of the world.

A similar criticism might be passed on Jacques Anatole Thibault, better known as Anatole France. The mind of this winner of the Nobel Prize for letters was a veritable storehouse of multiform and erudite scholarship. His writings, enriched by a diversified but elusive style, reflect the varying moods and occupations of his caustic and egotistical spirit. He became in turn ironist, humanist, pacifist, nihilist, skeptic. But his characteristic attitude to life was that of a cynical pagan who had fore-sworn allegiance to those fundamental beliefs which sanitize the world.<sup>11</sup> He has been called the



spiritual stepson of Renan, but his later writings belie the paternity. They bear as little resemblance to the habitual reverence shown by the famous Breton as darkness to light. It was in one of his tempestuous moments that he excoriated Catholicism as "l'antique exterminatrice de toute pensée, de toute science et de toute joie." The explanation of this impulsive outburst is found in his cult of excessiveness, dominated as it was by the tyranny of sensuousness which led him to deny the human capacity for creative imagination. He contended that the best one can do is to assemble a mosaic of ideas. Yet his own works contradict his contention. It must be admitted that their influence tends to undermine the *morale* of life; to leave it without restraint, bereft of the virtues which hallow human intercourse. M. Victor Giraud, a fellow "Immortal" of the French Academy, accused Anatole France to his face of having "encouraged unwholesome dreams and enervating dilletantism." The accusation was none too severe. His eminence in the republic of letters does not save him from the charge of having been a menace to public morals in his own country and beyond its frontiers. Much of the popular contemporary literature in the United States and other lands is clear proof that novelists, essayists and dramatists are rivals in the repellent portrayal of what is perversely unclean or ignominiously decadent.<sup>12</sup>

No servant of Christ should venture near the edge of this slippery slope. Yet the malady of egotism which afflicted Baudelaire, Anatole France

<sup>11</sup> Cf. Jean Jacques Brousson: *Anatole France Himself*.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. Dr. W. V. Kelley: Article, "At the Sign of the Basilisk," *Methodist Review*, July, 1925, p. 518 ff.



and other writers of their school is not unknown in the Christian ministry. Nor are those clerics immune from it who indulge in mental peculiarities which forbode moral disaster. Nothing could be worse in the minister than a morbid imagination at the mercy of an avid egotism. Such a masquerader will probably attempt to be extraordinary and end by being ridiculous. He supposes that imitation of some celebrated divine is a short cut to reputation, only to find it a bypath to notoriety. Unless he takes vigorous measures against this infirmity, he will presently retain no intellectual life of his own nor even possess his own soul. The preacher who dreams day and night of popular applause is apt to play the sedulous ape, say what he is expected to say and slavishly copy those whom he deems successful. He who struts in borrowed plumes because he hesitates to be his essential self shows neither good sense nor good psychology. The fulness and freshness of a preacher's output proceed from his inward emotions and visions. Avoid therefore petty pilferings from well-known preachers or speakers. Abstain from imitating their voice inflections and gestures, or repeating their ornate, humorous and pathetic allusions. Image yourself as you ought to be and scrutinize with humility and decision your excellencies and defects of heart and mind. Strive to approximate toward the lofty original of the New Testament pattern of a good minister of Jesus Christ.

Here additional caution is advisable against indulgence in hankerings which are easily transmutable into blamable behavior. The preacher who loses out in action does so because he has previously

lost out in thought. The heart may be the seat of his visions and dreams, but the mind gives them form and vigor. Buddha made an acute diagnosis when he singled out "Desire" as the primary matter for the individual's care. But he strayed from the path of good counsel like a man blindfolded when he proposed the nullification and not the regulation of Desire. The Old Testament speaks more to the point in urging us to keep the living issues of the heart with all diligence. The Apostolic method is better still: "Whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honorable, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things."<sup>13</sup> It is a truism that we become like what we inwardly admire. Loves and hates cherished in secret are unfailing sources of help or harm. They exalt the beauty or accent the terror of persons and things, laying bare the spirit within us and wedding it either to sorrow or to joy. When these hidden preferences and repulsions cannot safely be exposed they repress life and prevent its rational growth by severing it from its environment. They are as inimical to intellectual and moral development as to every practical policy. Besides, to believe that pictured lies and iniquities will remain mere pictures is to evince ignorance of the laws that govern human mentality. Shut up in the breast, evil imaginations breed like rabbits and sting like hornets. Action equals reaction. The contribution which a sound and proper exercise of the image making power makes to what is virtuous and estimable in human character, is matched

<sup>13</sup> Proverbs iv. 23; Philippians iv. 8.

by the damage done when it is abused and made to further what is vicious and detestable.

There are other and more dangerous pitfalls of imagination which call for mention in view of present social conditions. Those who know the pressure of the conflict now raging between the flesh and the spirit will praise the divine grace which enables them to overcome its temptations, and view with helpful compassion the folly and misery which that conflict entails. Its severity is attested by the verdict of Dr. Schweitzer, in whose judgment civilization itself is jeopardized because it lacks moral depth and virility. Inasmuch as it is still fundamentally ethical, its preservation and growth depend upon its religious sanity and strength.<sup>14</sup> Yet how can it retain these qualities apart from ideals which are not merely private dreams nor even racial characteristics, but vested rights in the free nature of things, for which the cosmic order itself is sponsor? Shy from it as men may, *the morality which defends them from destruction relates human conduct to the ultimate law of Eternal Righteousness*. Those who spurn this line of argument, and boast of their escape from what they call the superstitious clutches of historic Christianity, only land themselves in a ghastly struggle with anarchies which threaten all morality. Ethical principles describe the orbit of human nature as the courses of the planets are described by the sun. What men call right as opposed to wrong justifies itself by its poise and bearing in the world of realities. Images and visualizations in revolt against this correspondence are useless rebellions against the destined order and

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<sup>14</sup> Cf. Albert Schweitzer: *The Decay and the Restoration of Civilization*, pp. 9 ff.; 97 ff.

progress of the race. I plead for imagination's subjection to ethical control, because without it the world of reason and of righteousness cannot be reliably appraised nor its real values appreciated.<sup>15</sup>

The struggle to keep this balance true is aggravated by writers who are adepts in sensual filth. They are often indifferent to the unity, coherence and purpose of their works so long as these exploit the underworld of animalism with malicious satire and lascivious description. We are commissioned by God and by all decent people to reprobate these infamous literary perverts. But when we undertake to do so they tell us that since we are only hack moralists of the pulpit, we must not interfere with the long delayed mission of imagination in the new realism. They are determined to show humanity how bestial it actually is, and to reveal to both adults and adolescents the varied elements of comedy and tragedy in its physical abnormalities. What happens to the morals of their readers in consequence gives no concern to the self-elected purveyors of pornography. Few in number, but far too devastating in influence, these peddlers of degeneracy insist that they seek neither to upraise nor to lower human nature, but to hold up the mirror of life so unflinchingly that the reader may see therein his own face. According to them, immorality, especially in relation to sex, is no longer sinful.<sup>16</sup> Far otherwise, declared Pierre Louys, member of an old Protestant family of France, who died the other day at the early age of fifty-five. No single author of his time, not even Anatole France, has done more than Louys to infuse pagan blood into continental

<sup>15</sup> Cf. Rufus M. Jones: *Fundamental Ends of Life*, p. 120 ff.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. Bertrand Russell: *What I Believe*, p. 49.

life. "Sensuality," he proclaimed, "is the mysterious but necessary creative source of intellectual development." His books were manuals of lust ending in the cruelty complex. Yet his *Aphrodite*, a plea for romantic sex degradation, sold at the rate of one hundred and twenty-five thousand copies within a year. Sin, he claimed, is not even ugly, since ugliness is only a disproportion which offends the æsthetic sense. Nor is it the fruit of vicious principles, or the elemental outlet of weak, base and guilty souls. All such naive notions belong to the stodgy, stingy and hypocritical Victorian Age, which invited its youth to partake of fictitious delights and stuffed their minds with pious frauds. Our contemporary emissaries of moral leprosy proclaim with mock ceremony, not only that it is their bounden duty to dredge in every sewer, but that the garbage which they sluice out should find a ready welcome, provided it is well garnished with literary devices. Some of them would go farther, if they could, and revive the colossal licentiousness of the Renaissance. The human race, as they see it, sprang from ageless deposits of primeval slime and in searching for renewal it should burrow down into its aboriginal ooze. Such is the avowed objective of D. H. Lawrence in *Reflections on the Death of a Porcupine* and in his other books. Historical precedents are scouted and ethical standards are reversed in order that continence may be presented as cowardice, sex prostitution as courage, and saturnalias as conducive to growth of soul. Such are some of the somersaults of sense and reason typical of a school of eroticism, whose writers remind one of the village idiot spitting in the air, unaware that the spittle is falling on his own face.



Although psychoanalysis originated in Europe, it has not inundated that continent with anything like the volume that reaches our shores. Its pre-occupations are mainly with the sexual, upon which prevalent obsession its Freudian advocates expatiate in variations that contradict experience and subvert morals. Repression of the flesh seems to them to be no less heinous than the sin against the Holy Ghost. To be quietly and completely married, or to love God supremely signifies the repression of sentiments and desires, or else their transfer from their proper objects. Whatever else a man does he must "keep the libido flowing" if he would not have his subconscious self checkmated and betrayed. To be sure, this latest science of the mind has corrected numerous distortions and rescued it from the miseries of many misdirected imagisms. But when it is purged of its flubdubbery and disrobed of the garments in which it has been dressed up by literature and the drama, one finds, as the crowd psychology has already instinctively surmised, that much that goes under the name of psychoanalysis, far from being an exact science, is purely tentative. Its largest intelligible contribution is its message that human nature transcends both good and evil and does so on a scale beyond all that is revealed by conscious perception. My readers who wish to feel comfortable, however, despite some vinegary psychoanalysts, have but to read Fritz Wittel's book on Sigmund Freud, to find that the creators of the science are themselves faulty in its pursuit. We also learn that Freud considers himself Napoleon, that Jung paints pictures, that Stekel writes eloquent essays. As for amateur



psychoanalysts who abound in America, the well-informed can afford to smile at the squanderings of their egoism. Their exposition of the Freudian psychology degenerates for the most part into analysis of sex impulses and a tacit plea for their free play.<sup>17</sup>

Yet if experience is a sound criterion, it is never rational to plead for immorality as either inevitable or necessary. Nor does the knowledge of its carnal riotings contribute to the efficiency of life. On the contrary, the racial witness testifies that fleshly diabolisms are the final shufflings of a dirty breed doomed to sterility and extinction. Imagination's beneficial exercise is determined by its obedience to that witness, ratified as it is by Holy Scripture's revelations. The difference is profound and irreconcilable between authors who depict the morals of the barnyard, and the authors of the Sacred Word who insist that since all unrighteousness is sin it must be resisted to the utmost. The plague spots of moral degeneracy are as yet restricted in Christendom. But its virulent contagiousness is conceded by competent observers. To compare the present conspiracy against normal behavior with the principles and practices of ancient Greece is an insult to the best classic Paganism. Our course downward has been a gradual one. It began with the decreased consciousness of sin, which was no longer strenuously repudiated or condemned. It was then excused by

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<sup>17</sup> Cf. S. Freud: *Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis*; Ernest Jones: *Papers on Psychoanalysis*; J. T. McCurdy: *Problems in Dynamic Psychology*; C. Baudouin: *Studies in Psychoanalysis*; W. McDougall: *Introduction to Social Psychology* (fourteenth edition); Cyril E. Hudson: *Recent Psychology and the Christian Religion*; R. H. Thouless: *An Introduction to the Psychology of Religion*; George A. Dorsey: *Why We Behave Like Human Beings*.

light censure, or damned with faint praise. Eventually it was serenely palliated, and finally glorified.

One does not have to be a precisian to resent these sappings and minings of private and public welfare. Nor are preachers educated, as some libelously assert, to enjoy a glamorous Garden of Eden, but not to conquer an obstinately wicked world. It was the Light of the World Himself who warned his followers not to be less alert, sagacious and insistent than the children of its darkness. Unless we heed this counsel the malefic creatures that prey on humanity's soul will outdo us. We know that moral ends cannot be secured by imposing needless and harrassing limitations on literary artists or on their comrades of the brush and the stage. But if they use material which properly belongs to hospitals for nervous or venereal diseases, the abnormal impulses of morons and degenerates will be stimulated, and the opposition of morally sane people will be aroused. The plea for non-interference with an unlimited eroticism cannot be conceded, if only for the reason that childhood and youth are entitled to defense from those who confuse necessary distinctions, confound right with wrong, snap the mainsprings of worthy conduct and let loose floods of filthy speculations to pollute the general mind. It is time to call a halt when an author of standing can avow that crime is no more than a word; that what is good or evil, true or false, should be left entirely to individual determination; and that morality today is nothing but a blank page on which everyone writes whatever code he chooses.

Yet the most dangerous enemies of morality are not the reckless scribblers of pestilential piffle. They are found in a certain class of literary luminaries

who seek to overthrow with specious and enticing suggestiveness the divine philosophy of morals which is humanity's safeguard. These creatures dishonor their kind by crucifying conscience and pontificating in unspeakable evils smuggled in underneath clever imageries and an attractive style. Imagination is for them the procuress of the pit. Aware as we are of how slowly beneficial truth gets itself expressed in action, especially when it calls for sacrificial effort, we ought to remind ourselves how quickly such incitements to base self-indulgence are entertained by the vicious. Dr. Joseph Collins, in his three recent volumes, *The Doctor Looks at Literature*, *Taking the Literary Pulse* and *The Doctor Looks at Biography*, sometimes allows the physician to get the better of the artist. His synopses of a few of the more prominent members of the openly aphrodisiac group read like a treatise on sex. Nevertheless, he dissects their brains with professional skill, and if he exhibits any animus it is justified by his irrepressible moral indignation. But it is Dr. Collins as an expert alienist, not as a moralist or as a literary critic, who is concerned with the social consequences of this costly group and with the description and classification of the facts of its mental life. One agrees with him that though imagination is often only three leaps from the jungle, as the main organ of our intellectual processes we have a right to expect from it behavior in accord with the best social ideals. His chief complaint is that while the business of the poet and the novelist to see life steadily, accurately and as a whole, too many of them pertinaciously depict it in ways not humanly possible. These offenders specialize in every imaginable symptom of the sick soul. But they do

not always remember that the psychology which they follow is by no means an exact science. Even if it were, the diagnosis of the sick soul should not be separated from the curative science known as psychotherapy.

Few things in our day call more loudly for faithful and fearless chastisement than the aberrations of talented men who would annul the laws of human perpetuity. One cannot unfold here the terrible tale of selfishness, shame, crime, misery and death which their damnatory use of the imagination has caused among the young and the erstwhile innocent. Nor is this dissoluteness of the gifted confined to literary scavengers. Many masters of technique in painting and sculpture have registered zero in moral character. The connection between such supreme artistry and the abysmal depths of flesh and spirit is a mystery which thinkers seem unable to unveil. On the other hand, when personal goodness has formed the bond between geniuses of art and their creations, these became resistless. So men artistically gifted divide into two groups, both containing poets, dramatists, novelists, painters, philosophers, orators and musicians. Between them, however, runs a demarcation line that has always separated mankind, from the time of Cain and Abel to that of Oscar Wilde and Walter Pater. The first group often drapes its iniquities in purple and gold; and since the days of ancient Greece, its preëminently talented individuals have been wrongly excused for many moral derelictions for which their fellow men were held strictly to account. Yet charnelism is inseparable from their creations, and though the dividing line I have mentioned may not be very palpable to this world, it is an adamant barrier in the

world to come. The second group has made the path already staked out more plain to all who desire to find the true home of the imagination and enjoy its supreme benefits. Its members have refused to tarnish their creations with excess of any kind. Without cavil, their careers prove that after making full allowance for the penalties of greatness, its compensations are far beyond the ordinary, and that mankind has a right to expect loyalty, lawfulness and service from its more highly endowed spirits.

## V

I do not propose to recite a lengthy list of the products of diseased imagination, since little of benefit is to be obtained from it. In their determination that all shall know the sordid and the turbulent, certain infected egotists parade parodies of life which are compounded of a lavish use of occult symbolisms and more or less prudent descriptions of nameless vices. Mental hygiene has a deeper significance for one who has penalized himself by wading through these animalistic admixtures. Indirectly they serve to convince us of the stern necessity of a reasonable observance of moral conventions and so defeat the main aim of their authors. Another prolific type of depressing though not debauched imagism is given to long descriptions of deep-seated mental or moral disturbances. Dostoevsky meets the postulant at the gates of the spiritual temple of Romance with dismal accounts of hysteria, hallucination and incipient or actual madness. Alienists discuss his uncanny dexterity in analyzing and portraying these melancholy conditions, as painters dis-



cuss the supreme powers of Velasquez or Rembrandt. Of the five great Russian masters of fiction whom the theological student should know, Gogol, Turgeniev, Tolstoy, Tchekhov and Dostoievsky, the last excelled in passionate and pathetic sincerity. Yet emotional insanity and human defectives of every degree were his favorite themes. The fact that he was an epileptic may explain his quiescence in the presence of appalling tragedies. We have also to remember that as a Siberian convict he suffered the abysmal experiences which are depicted in *The House of the Dead*. The patience, constancy and humility of that life document are scarcely exceeded in the annals of the saints. His readers revere his charity for the bestial and treacherous criminals with whom he was compelled to keep company during the deplorable years of bondage when he was legally dead and actually far worse than dead. But what good purpose is served by these characters of Dostoievsky? They crave deception and torture, refuse peace and happiness, grovel in voluptuous ecstasy, writhe in agony or wallow in humiliation. Perhaps the answer is that in his work of self-revelation, this photographer of the soul's awful capacity for self-inflicted pain and imposed loneliness also indicates its helplessness apart from a merciful God. His religious value for preachers is in his ability to tear the mask off those hidden malformations of human nature which largely justify New Testament Christianity's consistent abhorrence of sin and its results.

In the works of another imagist, the well-known French author, Marcel Proust, who is highly praised by Joseph Conrad and George Saintsbury, we are too often confronted with a dedication of superb

powers to the depiction of unspeakable things. A bad odor floats out of the enchanted gardens of Proust's exotic art. One meets there the most abject specimens of meanness, hatefulness, pretense and sexual perversion. Nor can the author always be regarded apart from the abominations of which he has made so close a study. It is often difficult for the reader to separate the one from the other. It is no defense to say that such deadly products of a corrupted imagination impart no special urge to the general mind. Given the lift and lilt of a word magician, they often go far to produce undesirable moral and social results. Of a truth, men are bound to sample the good or the evil in that which imagination first suggests. Every upward or downward social movement is more or less involved in the published creations of the image making power. Rousseau's fancy that the natural man was free, noble and exalted, and that civilization had been his Nemesis, although an unadulterated fiction, tore European civilization to shreds. Similarly false mental gestures have been productive of other popular ideas which still sway the masses. Pictures of the mind may seem to be but furtive shadows, but once they take hold on the public their power to revolutionize outweighs that of all other activities, and they make or break communities and nations. So imagination's abuses traverse the human situation. They seduce saint and sinner, pulpit and pew, professorial chair and writer's pen, laboratory and political arena. Its deadlier forms have also given rise to a sex lawlessness responsible for a frightful entail of suffering and remorse.

I shall not penetrate further the realm of these perversions, where the worst offenders convey by

innuendo what they dare not say openly. Yet I do not leave it believing that all references to pulchritude or to physical processes are inimical to morals. The Elizabethan writers, whom every preacher should study, could distil from these same circumstances splendor of a most natural sort. But few of the writers on whom we have cast a passing glance have visualized that splendor. Their characters posture, rant and whine like bedlamites in sceneries which are repellent to a clean mind and a clear vision. Contrast with them Shakespeare's female characters who combined sweetness, strength and wisdom, and indeed every attractive feature of feminine loveliness. Those of you who have studied Imogen, Rosalind, Ophelia, Portia and Juliet in his glorious gallery of women, will scarcely pardon me for not bringing you into their exalted society with more ceremony, after the saturnalia of beastly grotesqueness just dismissed. One fresh look at them is sufficient to understand the preacher's aspiration to be robed and crowned with a balanced and consecrated imagination.

There have been hundreds of choice minds engaged in creative literature who followed the precedents set by Homer, Dante, Shakespeare and Milton. Their works are not ornamented affectations straining for effect. At their best these writers are serene, pure, sustained. Some of them are poets whose melodies are reminiscent of those which flooded heaven's vault when the morning stars sang together for joy. The mental pictures they transmit have swayed the preaching mind and supplied it with its fairest material. Although dead, they are yet alive for evermore; potent and communicative; unsurpassed in beauty, truth and goodness. They

are the sources of moral and religious advantage, and form, as it were, an armory stored with trusted weapons for man's warfare against his most formidable foe—a corrupted imagination. In Bunyan's allegory, Pilgrim, who went down the Valley and into the River, heard fiends whispering blasphemies in his ears. He supposed these evil voices to be an echo of his own thoughts. The Bedford dreamer well understood that the reflexes of man's long primeval past are prone to attack the best in us and have no regard even for the sacrament of death. Truly none can escape what he has thought, dreamed or done. In the realm of imagination there are odd and frightful apparitions which we would fain bury in oblivion. The effective protection against their assaults is found in the consecration of imagination's mysterious powers to the Christ of God and the service of men. It may not bring us to final positions, nor express for us the inexpressible. But it will explore every avenue of thought and every means of positive faith we acquire, always leaving scope for additional disclosures of the Eternal Mind. Its disciplined use will keep preachers in touch with their times, enabling them to explain the Church and her Gospel to the intelligence of their hearers, to take account of religious realities and to justify the ways of God toward man.

## CHAPTER IV

### IMAGINATION IN MAN'S SPIRITUAL GROWTH

An expansive imagination needed in religious thought—The symbolical interpretations of mythology—Man's intellectual and spiritual growth from lowly origins in communal life—The relation of the various mythologies to life in its many moods as illustrated by the world's greatest literature—Processes of purifying mythological ideas—The Mystery Religions—The religious world of India, Egypt and Greece—The modern outlook for religion.

Protestant theology is to be credited with many excellent works, but some of its masters refuse to meet the present requirements. These demand a pronounced expansion of that theology's basic ideas in harmony with the verified results of modern learning. Again, while American Protestantism as a whole, whether liberal or conservative, is active and alert, its worship needs enrichment on every side. Many of its devotional forms are archaic or threadbare; others are not conducive to that reverence which is the gateway to God. The whole situation can be readjusted by a vivid and informed use of imagination which restores spiritual realities to their proper elevation in thought and feeling. Such a use transformed music when Beethoven followed Haydn and Mozart, and renewed poetry when



Wordsworth came in the wake of the supposedly impeccable school of Pope. Hitherto, pride of attainment, due to the illusion of finality, has hindered the Gospel's larger interpretations and stultified some doctrinal systems and pulpit messages of the twentieth century. If our historic creeds are not to place a premium on thoughtlessness, they must be renewed in life's realities. Much that some preachers offer today is either too isolated and abstract or too intellectually thin to serve men's highest ends. It lacks fulness and fire imparted by an imagination quickened through experimental faith and nourished upon divine verities.<sup>1</sup> Many of the difficulties which embarrass the Christian ministry are invented and therefore removable; others are inherent and have to be squarely faced by the Church. The all-inclusive fellowship which she proposes as civilization's chief defense against the tyranny of materialism would gain more speedily if the hinterlands of humanity were again thoroughly explored. Until recently the historian, the thinker and the preacher were compelled to force man's origin, development, culture and the whole drama of his presence on the earth into the petty round of centuries allotted them by an arbitrary chronology. The majority of our guides and teachers have been handicapped by this miscalculation, and many Biblical scholars are still dominated by it. Never was an immense antiquity so crowded for room. Seldom were its religious explanations more seriously hampered by the same false economy.

Preachers who believe and therefore do not make haste, who are not so hurried that they fail to appreciate God's longsuffering, will patiently

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<sup>1</sup> N. J. Burton: *In Pulpit and Parish*, p. 51 ff.

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examine the debris of mythology which an ageless past has jettisoned into our day. Its countless imagisms and symbols display a picturesqueness, a romance, a dramatic intensity all their own. They are distinct mementoes of man's evil and good, of his depravity and dignity, of his crass barbarism and refined culture. These remains are so widespread, numberless and complicated that their mere tabulation requires many portly volumes. Some of their fables were sufficiently moralized to give the individual and society a humanizing drift. Others were simply examples of the marvelous. Still others were merely bestial, fished up out of the foul depths from which emerge corrupt phantoms of the mind, like those that tormented Bunyan's Pilgrim in his dying moments. Whatever their source and character, they show intimate relations with ultimate questions concerning religion, and are clothed in a solemnity and bigness which nothing small in the modern man can apprehend. These symbolical interpretations frequently contain banalities and crudities that after ages have banished from imaginative thinking. But they also had a beneficial cultural side which should not be ignored by the preacher. The imaginative method employed in them is his reliance as a minister in the things of the Spirit, and when rightly practiced, as we have noted, it communicates a peculiarly vital force to his utterance.

Early races were practically compelled to give a visible outlet to their inward longings, loves and aversions in tales, rites, ceremonies and kindred modes of expression. Since emotion always precedes intellectual conceptions, these legends and rituals are far older than arguments. Their pre-

cedence is apparent in every process which visualizes the unseen. As imagination is the very marrow of that visualization, it is the first essential of persuasive preaching. Do not therefore hold in light esteem those primitive forbears of ours who originated or borrowed symbolisms to embody spiritual phenomena. Their beliefs, customs and institutions held in solution the saving verities they dimly discerned. Their tribal morality, however crude or bizarre, was at least living and human. Unlike some intelligentsia today, they made comparatively few surrenders to passion or its carnal manifestations. On the contrary, these aboriginals often surpassed in ideals what they achieved in symbolic practice. They held to the forward quest, despite the welter of abnormalities and horrors in which they lived. They rose up out of the pit and from the miry clay to undertake by means of imagination some of the most valiant adventures of the human soul. They did not refuse to enter within the veil. Even in the twilight zone, which their fancies peopled with grim shapes of woeful terror, they often glimpsed the eternal brightness beyond.

The historic truth that civilization arose from savagery, and knowledge from abysmal ignorance and superstition, is not welcome to large numbers of believers. They shut their eyes to these lowly origins, the consequences of which persist in all forms of religion, including Christianity, despite the fact that those consequences have served warring nations as pretexts for their treacherous behavior. The vices and cruelties that fill so many pages of history are traceable to human nature itself, so slowly evolving upward from the brute. However pain-

ful is the admission that degradation and grandeur strangely blend in man's spiritual development, its utter contrasts make his story the more impressive. Our vision of the prolonged perspective of his past, marked as it is by the growth of his imaginative powers and of their fruit in mystic symbolisms, testifies to the divine purpose behind human progress. It flatly contradicts the pessimistic theory of an indifferent or a hostile universe in which humanity is the pawn of measureless and insensate forces.

Man's known course of life on earth exhibits degrading inherited impulses, emotions and urges, which but vanish to reappear and pursue an intermittent existence. At the present stage they come and go according to our varying success in subordinating them to civilization's requirements. Even in cultured persons and communities these lower instincts, after beating a sullen retreat before the higher ones, suddenly make a desperate rally. Comparatively few generations thus far have enjoyed the benefits of a stable and well-ordered society. Antagonistic forces are always on the prowl to remind us that man's adaptation to his environment has already exhausted vast periods of antiquity, the majority of which are buried in the mists of legend. If anyone supposes that the Biblical doctrine of original sin is without historic support, he has but to consider those branches of the human family which linger in the blighting shadows of an immemorial past. They exhibit a tragic incompetence, the more depressing because surrounding Nature is usually self-sufficient and independent. The nomad and the cave dweller who still inhabit some of

earth's beautiful and fertile provinces are witnesses that only man is vile. Sedentary thinkers need not be baffled by the spectacle of advanced nations which occasionally give way to the savage atavisms supposedly extinct in them. The choicest civilization is only a few removes from barbarism.

Just as biological experts assure us that man's physical organism has gradually evolved from rudimentary forms, so many psychologists are equally convinced that his spiritual being has had a similar ascent.<sup>2</sup> Their idea is that what we call the soul has had an arduous passage from an extremely chaotic state to its present condition. Growth, selection and adaptation of emotions and images are held responsible for the mind's progression from the sway of passion to that of reason. If this theory is correct, the development it suggests is a far greater marvel than any connected with physical evolution. The noblest attributes of the Presiding Mind of the universe are exhibited in His spiritual education of the human race. It is easier to bend man's environment to his advantage than it is to subject man himself to those intellectual and moral ideals which should characterize Christian society. We know to our sorrow how narrow is the margin between human nature's dark tumultuous heritage and the mental and moral sanity indispensable to our present peace and welfare. Out of the hazards of this progression two considerations emerge to corroborate Biblical teaching. One is that man was indeed born in sin and shaped in iniquity to an unsuspected degree; the other that his entire develop-

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<sup>2</sup> Cf. James Y. Simpson: *Man and the Attainment of Immortality*, p. 216 ff.; John Laird: *The Idea of the Soul*, p. 43 ff.; James A. Robertson: *Concerning the Soul*, p. 42 ff.



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ment has been a historic preparation for God's redeeming grace.

Other considerations emphasizing imagination's part in the educational process are in point here. Its initial activities and primary forms were the work of groups and not of individuals. The dictates of social custom, rather than the behests of Nature, created symbolisms to preserve what they represented. The prevalent idea that the earliest human clans were purely domestic in kind, centering in a common ancestor and dependent upon kinship of blood, is contradicted by the fact that in ideas, regulations and duties they differ widely. Go back as far as one may, and ordered societies of men and women of mixed descent are still the universal rule. Such primitive societies are not to be confused with those marked by full political rule and responsibility. Yet they were sufficiently political to impose obligations upon their members in the triple realm of rights, customs and morals. They created the family instead of the family creating them. The religious uses of the imagination began with collective man and not with individuals. Apart from his communal life the individual might have remained a stray brute. The gods of primitive groups were charged with the maintenance of the group welfare, regardless of cost to the individual. Thus the solitary were gathered into larger social units than is commonly believed to have been the case. Physical needs, curbed by "common consent" customs, were maintained by tribal traditions or by united religious ceremonies. The migrations of the Eskimos of Greenland from places where food was plentiful to where it was scarce; the discrimination against nutritious foods exercised by races belonging

to the Homeric period, and also by the natives of Madagascar in our time; the refusal of the Hidatsa Indians of North America to cut down large living trees; the classing of the destruction of the cocoa-nut palm by West Africans as a crime equal to parricide, alike illustrate the superior standing given to spiritual conceptions in early group life. It is clear that utilitarian ends were not always the chief concern. Spiritual conceptions made valuable eatables taboo, and determined the dress and the place of residence of individuals and families. Magical rites which stimulated the taming of wild cattle, the cultivation of the soil, the harvesting of crops, the promotion of general safety and comfort were collective rites. We are dealing at this juncture, not with men as units, but with men in very simple societies that were nevertheless capable of concerted belief and action.

## II

Their numberless mythologies were created by the freest use of imagination, and they sustain a relation to life resembling that of aerial navigation to the earth. Both start with their feet on the ground, let them end where they may. Though the appeal of the legend and the myth was to the three primal instincts of fear, caution and anger, no human emotion was really outside their scope, so that vanished tribes often live again in their symbolisms. These reward research because they preserve once vibrant beliefs and customs and are indicative of the awe and reverence which inaugurated human worship. No other experience was so provocative of intelligence in our primeval ancestors as the adoration they felt in the presence of the

unseen and its mysteries. They unfolded these mysteries as the dramatist unfolds the plot of his play, and as the novelist writes himself into his fiction. Into their folklore, fairy tales, dreams and legends went a flexibility and a freedom which spoke volumes for mankind's intellectual future. These creations have had a greater influence over man's spiritual growth than any form of purely secular education. It is true that some mythological ideas are gruesome in the extreme; others so shadowy and remote as to be little more than

"Blank misgivings of a creature  
Moving about in worlds not realized."

But at their best, the ancient mythologies were often instinct with ethereal beauty and wisdom. Their finest symbols and rituals soar above the strife and oppression of things seen. They gave the aboriginal his controlling conceptions of love, life, death and immortality. Their main content reveals its human creators in unimpeded attitudes of heart and mind. Passions opposed to each other had full swing. Dreams filched from sleep added to the significance the day's deeds. The horrible aspects of folklore can be safely attributed to nightmares such as still terrorize the child.

These diversified products of the religious imagination were temperamentally true of the individual, the clan and the race. From their thick deposits the student mines the facts which form the basis of the psychology that explains extinct and existing peoples. He identifies also in their beliefs and practices the fragments from which later religions were gradually formed. Thus the crooked was provisionally made straight, and the rough places plain.

The densest blackness was shot with the first faint gleams of a nearing dawn. Nor was this glacier-like process of change broken at any period. Æons could not sunder its causal relations which connected the earliest and lowest gropings of thought and effort with their latest and highest achievements. The miraculous profile drawn by Paul Veronese, with one incomparable stroke, which Ruskin praised is no more amazing than are the pictures of animals carved by prehistoric man in the interiors of caves in France. When Dante sang of "His glory by whose might all things are moved," the mediaeval poet prophet introduced his stern and searching poem of the unseen triple kingdom of souls with the memorable lines:

"Half way upon the journey of our life  
I roused to find myself within a forest  
In darkness, for the straight way had been lost."<sup>3</sup>

That immortal work began as begin the fairy tales of childhood, which are the most ancient and efficient pabulum for the nursery and the university.

The custom of telling fairy tales to children has its drawbacks, but its parental use is its best apology. It offsets the dismal croakings of those who insist that men are doomed to a life which is all sound and fury, signifying nothing. Shakespeare's outburst of reasonable optimism is opportune in this connection:

"Beauty, truth, and rarity,  
Grace in all simplicity  
Here enclosed in cinders lie."<sup>4</sup>

The dramatist liberates parent and child, poet and

<sup>3</sup> *The Divine Comedy*, translated by Henry Johnson.

<sup>4</sup> *The Phoenix and Turtle*.

peasant, preacher and people from spiritual despair and death; and exemplifies the use of those imagisms which have persuaded man to enlist for the noblest adventures of the life of faith. He is so constituted that if he can but catch a gleam of the good he seeks he will ultimately win it. From this viewpoint one may note that often in the past incredible belief has vanquished reasoned doubt, and what was actually known became negligible compared with what was only dreamt. Of course mythologies have had their Infernos which forbade confidence, but even so they could not eliminate hope. The clouds and darkness enveloping imagination at its nadir have seldom prevented it from reflecting the light of Supreme Love. William Blake, to whom we may return again, declared that he *knew* and did not simply believe in that Love, through the image making power alone. He knew it as the author of the Fourth Gospel knew that Jesus was the Christ. Hence the British mystic's determination:

"I will not cease from mental fight,  
Nor shall my sword sleep in my hand,  
Till we have built Jerusalem  
In England's green and pleasant land."

The reference in this stanza is not to Church, State or a new Social Order, but to imagination's anticipated triumph over logical reason. For Blake the realm of imagination was real and eternal, while the domain of physical generation was a passing show. There was for him no other Christianity and no other Gospel than the liberty to exercise the "divine arts" of imagination. By those arts the soul lives, as he held, far more than by any intellectual method which lack of faith renders sterile



and useless as an agency of progress. Hence he thunders against "the generalizing Demonstration of the Rational Power." The superconscious mind is life's appointed Lord. Its premonitions and inspirations come and go but finally reappear to triumph. They may be traduced by learned ignorance as a series of illusions, but for Blake, as for the majority of mystics, they are the "divine body" itself, the light that cannot fail.

The admission that the mythologies which embody this superconsciousness are the human abutment of the bridge between man and his Maker clarifies our discussion. They supply a silken thread of guidance in the limitless backgrounds which now open before us. The most adequate discussion of these mythologies is found in Sir James G. Frazer's twelve important volumes entitled *The Golden Bough*, which have won deserved eminence. The conception and execution of this notable work recall Browning's *The Ring and the Book*, which developed a monumental theme out of an obscure story.<sup>5</sup> It is now thirty years and more since Frazer set out to interpret the weird and ensanguined ceremonies that determined the succession in the priesthood of Diana on the shores of the beautiful lake of Nemi. The ancients called this placid water "Diana's Mirror," and its loveliness inspired one of Turner's best paintings. In a grove on its northern shore stood the sacred oak which the resident priest, "the King of the Wood," had to guard at the risk of his life. Should his defense fail he was murdered by his rival, who in turn would meet the same fate if he was remiss in this hazardous duty. So much

<sup>5</sup> Cf. James Hope Moulton: *The Christian Religion in the Study and the Street*, p. 213 ff.

was verifiable; but since Frazer could find no satisfactory explanation in classic annals for the blood-stained legend, he set out to seek it in the interminable atavisms of which Diana's shrine was but the latest symbol. His search led him into hitherto unrecorded circles of beliefs, traditions and practices, where the music of the bells on the priest's robes must surely have been difficult to hear. The seven hundred and fourteen pages of the abridged edition of *The Golden Bough* take the reader by countless tortuous backward routes into the fastnesses of the human spirit. At every stage of the journey he runs upon new versions of the legends in which lie deeply buried the roots of human spirituality. Man's slow creeping pace, as delineated here, fairly bewilders the reader. He is astonished to find that the first approaches of naked naturalism toward the all dominant supernal power were so extremely tentative and vacillating. Yet the journey through this labyrinth in the company of Frazer has its compensations. He trespasses on no forbidden grounds in science or religion. Nor does he moralize about the cults and superstitions he describes, or bring in the controversies connected with them. He sticks to his function as a trained investigator, content to trace the genesis of faith in man, and the paths of faith's progress from its rudest beginnings in savage tribes to its culmination in the religions of civilized man. The facts Frazer cites, however unwelcome to a certain type of mind, are indubitable. Their primary importance inaugurates a new era in comparative religion not less momentous than that created by Darwin's *Origin of Species* in biological science.

What are the chief conclusions to be drawn from this mass of material specifically in relation to the

study of imagination and religion? The question is stressed by those nondescript remnants of primitivism which still haunt the universal mind. First, the priest's midnight prowlings in Nemi's wood, ready to leap, sword in hand, upon an intruder present a picture of Fear which has seldom been excelled. The symbol crystallizes the ages dominated by this sentiment, and dramatizes their spiritual characteristic. Why not Fear, since man's battle for survival in a terrifying universe was as its height during those ages? The fight called for a courage and an endurance which civilization has not surpassed and hardly equalled. Personified and spelt with the capital letter in earlier forms, fear has ravaged the human spirit through the centuries, and lingers on in the impossible perditions of our day. Propitiation of the gods was its logical remedy. So the exiled Jacob arose where he had dreamt of the ladder and the angels, and there built an altar to his Deity, whom he also named Fear. Those who by the grace of Christ can call God Father will not treat these harried myriads of unknown yet heroic ancestors with derision. Their overtures to Heaven, though often ill advised, have the pioneering honors. They sowed in tears that we may reap in joy. From fear and propitiation of what was feared there came in the process of the centuries beliefs tinged with morality, actions conducted on a plane above mere force, displacements of compulsion by a perceptibly ethical tendency and courses of conduct regulated by faith rather than by dread. The priest, who was the ruler of the holy grove by the arbitrament of the sword, represents the class of priest kings who reigned prior to the advent of the king priest. Dynastic monarchies of the later and hieratic kind

in turn governed the Orient for many cycles. When they declined the priest survived the demise of the dual office, and was popularly credited with magical gifts restricted to his order. "Thus religion, beginning as a slight and partial acknowledgement of powers superior to man, tends with the growth of knowledge to deepen into a confession of man's entire and absolute dependence on the divine; his old free bearing is exchanged for an attitude of lowliest prostration before the mysterious powers of the unseen, and his highest virtue is to submit his will to theirs: *In la sua voluntade è nostra pace.*"<sup>6</sup>

The next product of primitive imagination was a pantheon of human gods, usually associated with tribal leaders, and like them, mysteriously able to control weather, crops, prosperity in peace, and victory in war. Many ages had to elapse before the gulf between gods and men was conceived to be impassable. These cults, objects of worship and the rites connected therewith covered nearly everything visible, from the sun suspended in the heavens to the lizard basking on the rock. They differed according to race, temperament and tradition. But it is not necessary for our present purpose to dwell on these differences either as to their causes or results. Dean Inge well remarks: "There is no hard and fast line between the imagination which enriches experience and the arbitrary fancy which impoverishes it. The luxuriant outcrop of myth may choke both philosophy and science. In religion, too, myths congeal or evaporate, and either process is fatal to them. Their province is to give substance to the faith which

<sup>6</sup> *The Golden Bough* (abridged edition), p. 58 f.

wanders in worlds not realized, bridging over, in some sort, the gap between the world of concrete fact and the world of value, between the things that are seen and the things that are not seen. But when the imagination no longer plays upon the dark region which it has filled with forms of its own, those forms either vanish into thin air or petrify into hard facts which claim falsely to belong to the world knowable by science."<sup>7</sup>

### III

Even a superficial survey of the mythological accumulations washed down by the stream of Time from the recesses of antiquity disturbs the complacent habit of the average religious mind. Accustomed to regard all sacred realities as divinely revealed in definite and fixed forms, this mind is often shocked to discover their seed in animisms, sorceries and idolatries which formerly abounded in a riot of seeming unreason. Yet such are the backgrounds of dreamers, poets, prophets, philosophers, scientists, statesmen and mathematicians. Many inventions and enterprises of a material kind also originated in the apparently disordered regions of myth and superstition. They are the precursors of astronomy and chemistry, to say nothing of other learned activities. It was man's imagination which inaugurated these pursuits and which also rejuvenates them, using the knowledge already gained to give them fresh life and broader meanings.<sup>8</sup> Warnings against romantic processes on the

<sup>7</sup> "Philosophy and Religion," in *Contemporary British Philosophy*, edited by J. H. Muirhead, First Series, p. 193.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Andrew D. White: *A History of the Warfare of Science with Theology in Christendom*, Vol. I, p. 114 ff., 373 ff.



grounds that they are necessarily wrong are only half true and therefore misleading. Without unduly extolling primitive imagisms, it has to be admitted that intimate relations subsist between them and some of civilization's best gifts. In the spacious domain of mythology cruelties and diabolisms range side by side with ideas and customs suggestive of divine benevolence and wisdom. Sophisticated people may affect to disdain the whole output, unaware that not a few of their peculiar beliefs are derived from the searchings of the heathen heart after light and succor. Indeed, in every age and under all conditions the intellects that set before mankind its loftiest beacons of thought and guidance have reached their conclusions by means of the imagination, rather than by the hard and thankless gropings of mere scientific inquiry.

Our greatest English poet and dramatist was one of these rare and unreasonable dreamers. Shakespeare had little learning, still less creedal religion and many superstitions. His plays and sonnets teem with allusions which are suspect to the modern mind. It was his projecting strength of vision which insured the permanence of his imaginative portraitures of life. He moved in a liberty all his own, following no given formulas. His treatment of his characters was by turns whimsical, fantastic, rhetorical, metaphysical; as varied and surprising as the unseen which he saw so vividly that he made the densest see it too.<sup>9</sup> Taine's striking comment that one could walk around the lions this poet created is within the mark. He painted not

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Levin L. Schucking: *Character Problems in Shakespeare's Plays*; Albert H. Tolman: *Falstaff and other Shakespearean Topics*.

only benign virtues and purest affections, but darkest vices and brooding vengeance. His gloomiest ghosts were summoned from the shades to mingle with a host of genial sprites and dancing fairies. Expiations, ceremonies, sacrifices, incantations of witches and spells of wizards performed their several parts in the unfolding drama of human existence at the behest of Shakespeare's great nature. Yet every age since his has lauded his ethical standards, and also notes the catholicity he showed toward Pagan, Jew and Christian alike.<sup>10</sup> No stronger or more satisfactory proof of the inseparable connection between man's religious past and present could be offered than Shakespeare affords. His liberal use of every sort of romance and the idealizations he gave to myths and legends make him, after the writers of the Bible, the minister's friend and teacher.<sup>11</sup>

The *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, the product of ages of national collaboration and not of Homer as their sole author, also furnish classic precedents for the pulpit's idealizations. They abound in folklore, songs, rites and legends of antiquity developed by countless additions and alterations which continued through many generations.<sup>12</sup> The completed poems are instinct with the sonorous and melodious harmonies of the Greek mind which afterwards took shape in art and architecture, or in philosophical and political conceptions that have had no superior. These poems are like temples open to the sunshine and the breeze, compact of beauty and of an unrivalled genius that owned nothing above

<sup>10</sup> Cf. Sir Henry Jones: *Essays on Literature and Education*, p. 167 ff.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. John Masefield: *Shakespeare and Spiritual Life*, pp. 7, 18.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. H. J. Rose: *Primitive Culture in Greece*, p. 65 ff.

itself. We who live in a scientific atmosphere find it increasingly difficult to appreciate work so imaginative. We think of Nature as impersonal or as the unknown cause of an ordered series of impressions upon the physical senses.<sup>13</sup> Experimental knowledge has cast the naive beliefs and practices bequeathed to us by non-scientific races into eclipse. No thinking individual questions the enormous gains resulting from science, but these gains should not blind us to the benefits of primitive and mediæval imagination.

Earlier man's passionate contests with Nature compelled him to personalize its forces and to invest them with sensible attributes. He felt obligated to maintain the good and expel the evil as he conceived them. If his symbols were frequently coarse and fantastic, so was his life. For the warfare he waged against adverse fates was no pastime. Yet let but a single gifted imagination play upon those symbols and they at once assumed a potency sufficient to determine thereafter the faith and conduct of millions of mankind. Transference of merit, tragic figures of monarchs self-doomed to a sacrificial death, tales of Hades, absurdities of Hindu asceticism, Celtic and Polynesian legends and Asiatic mysteries occupied as important a place in former man's spiritual evolution as did the *Gesta Romanorum* in that of the thirteenth and succeeding centuries.<sup>14</sup> They all have their place in the sum total of traditions that express the racial soul

<sup>13</sup> Cf. James Y. Simpson: *The Spiritual Interpretation of Nature*, p. 5 ff.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. *Gesta Romanorum*, translated by Charles Swan; *Vassar Mediæval Studies*, by members of the Faculty of Vassar College; *Mediæval Contributions to Modern Civilisation*, edited by F. J. C. Hearnshaw.

and contribute to its religious growth. The exigencies of their lives induced the Assyrian, the Egyptian and the Greek to enlist the aid of benevolently inclined gods like Osiris, Tammuz and Adonis. Of religion, as Christians understand it, they had scarcely a trace, yet they kept their pact with posterity. Happy are we if we emulate their fidelity!

Polluted mythological ideas and practices were frequently purified further down stream and eventually pressed into the service of moral ends. A striking instance of this process is associated with the Adonis myth, celebrated according to the rites of Aphrodite in Syria and the Island of Cyprus. There the same king who introduced customs involving female prostitution was also responsible for the institution of music as the most perfect language of worship.<sup>15</sup> Conceive, if you can, the abyss dividing the orgies of that degraded cult from the pieties of a Christian assembly. The Psalmist's ascription, "Surely the wrath of man shall praise thee," could hardly have a more striking comment. The distance upward from the clashing cymbals and swinish routs in the groves of Aphrodite to the strains of Bach or Palestrina in a Cathedral service registers an elevation begging words. Yet these extremes were related. The corruptible husk in the first forms perished and released the incorruptible kernel of good they imprisoned to the service of mankind. The fact that the courtesans devoted to the services of the Greek temples were known as *Hierodouloi*, "holy women" indicates how the root meaning of the adjective "holy" was separation to a designated purpose or office. This

<sup>15</sup> Cf. J. G. Frazer: *The Golden Bough*, p. 324 ff.

initial significance was glorified by the later uses of the word in the New Testament. Imagisms have thus scaled the heights of heaven from the depths of hell. Chantings that once defiled even the heathen have been transformed into the Magnificat of the saints in light. Well might Professor W. P. Paterson define religion as "an optimism whose foundations are laid in pessimism."

The ancient concepts of incarnation, atoning death and resurrection, and the sacramental nature of daily life also shared that same mysterious regeneration which accounts for man's ethical and spiritual ascendancy. Regarded narrowly these concepts are often vulgar and offensive, and have no more meaning in themselves than a single note torn out of a symphony. But blended by Time, hallowed by faith and mellowed by usage, they make the elementary music of humanity's homage to God. The dislike of prejudiced or ill-informed people for man's humble origins of body or soul is really detrimental to the cause of religion. It postpones their higher attainments in reason and in morals and brings the Faith into contempt among the learned. Some modern coteries are doubtless scandalized by the beliefs of earlier times that the wheat slain by reaping lived again in the flesh and blood of the reaper, or that deified heroes rescued their nations from impending peril by self-imposed death. Yet these beliefs have lit the road to the Supreme Sacrifice. Their mute witness to its underlying principles encompasses the hill called Calvary. A backward glance over the far-flung provinces of mythology and symbol shows much in them which was uncertain and obscure, but still more that was premonitory of motives, ideas and



methods that have revolutionized the inward life and the historic religions of humanity.

It is a logical transition from the mythologies to the Mystery Religions of the first Christian centuries. These Oriental cults were a conglomerate of magic, sorcery, theosophy, theurgy, occultism, astrology, solar monotheism and elemental mysticism. In those centuries of unprecedented contact between the West and the East, it was inevitable that Orientalism should proffer its panaceas to a world impoverished by moral and religious bankruptcy. Religious syncretism was thus developed on a large scale. The fusion of Greek philosophical thought, Hebrew theism and Pagan cultism also resulted in an eclecticism which was lacking in coherency, as might be expected from any attempt of the unimaginative West to annex the emotional faiths of the East. The Mystery Religions found their basic concepts in the recurring round of death and rebirth in Nature. Her seasons of spring and summer, autumn and winter had their replica in the hopes and fears of the human heart. Symbolism was the chief stock in trade of these mysteries. Allegory, myth and ceremonial rites conveyed impalpable experiences to the mind and heart. Dr. Angus points out that their popularity was due to the ritualistic apparatus, the exercise of magic, the offer to satisfy the desire for the knowledge of God and to the spectacular elements in the sacramental drama that inflamed the imagination, roused the emotions and induced ecstatic states. Among other factors were: the eschatological emphasis which maintained the nexus between this life and the next; the democratic attitude toward members of the fraternity who were religiously reborn, re-

ardless of their previous social standing; and the cosmic range of function which set man right with the sum total of things. Their elaborate rites of preparation and probation, of initiation and communion, of salvation and blessedness, further captivated the candidate and prepared him for fellowship with God in the mystic shrine.<sup>16</sup>

The types of Mystery Religion varied with the temperamental and moral environment of their adherents. The wild orgiastic rites of Magna Mater originated among the highly emotional peoples of the haunted tableland of Phrygia. The *taurobolium* or bath in bull's blood was an impressive sacrament of the Cybele-Attis cult. The great expenses often incurred were no obstacle because the performance of the rite brought to the initiate the experience of rebirth for eternity. The cult of Isis depended upon tranquillity for its effects. The performance of the drama of the death and resurrection of Osiris was intended to give the initiate an assurance of a similar personal triumph over death. Mithraism kept itself free from the extravagant features of both these cults. Its sober masculine faith won many Roman soldiers to its standard, and among its followers were ascetics, saints and martyrs. Participation in its *Agape* or sacramental meal introduced the communicants into fellowship not only with Mithra the sun god and mediator, but with all fellow believers. This central act of worship also included adoration, meditation and the use of a litany of praise sung to the music of flutes.

There is not the least doubt that these Mystery

<sup>16</sup> Cf. S. Angus: *The Mystery Religions and Christianity*, pp. 58 ff., 76 ff.

Religions offered an evangel to a disillusioned world, and that their strength largely lay in the skillful use of imagery. They ultimately failed because their riotous extravagances undermined them. Among the causes of their decay, according to Dr. Angus, were their intermixture with myths of primitive naturalism, their alliance with the pseudo science of astrology and the pseudo religion of magic, their extremism in separating the social from the religious instincts, their one-sided appeal to the feelings to the detriment of moral and spiritual susceptibilities.<sup>17</sup> Christianity abounded where these were found wanting. It substantiated its claims to superiority by the exacting test of tangible results based on the facts of a historical Christ, a rational creed, an ethical emphasis and a spiritual allegiance. These credentials offered a direct contrast to the beliefs of the Mystery Religions in an imaginary Magna Mater, an idealized Isis and a mythical Mithra. Nevertheless, the hurried survey of these cults and their ceremonials impresses us with the conviction that "through the ages one increasing purpose runs," and that the driftings of mankind, impelled and aided by imagination, have been steadily Godward, in spite of deviations, obsessions and interruptions.

#### IV

Man's spiritual nature was never left entirely at the mercy of his knavish or greedy impulses, nor was it forced to abdicate all its functions even among the lowest heathen tribes. It had its propitious epochs when knowledge grew and wisdom

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<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 247 ff.

lit up the objectives of faith. In China, Japan, and the empires of the near East, great literary religions such as Confucianism, Buddhism, Hinduism and Islam signalized and aided the human advance.<sup>18</sup> India, Egypt and Greece were the three centers of development marking the transition from unmixed superstitions to reasonable beliefs. Westward the star of the purer imagery of faith took its way, arising in the great Asiatic peninsula from behind the gigantic Himalayas, and slowly moving toward the place "where the young Child lay." The Hindu branch of the Aryan race, which migrated through those mighty mountains, found for itself a suitable home in the Ganges Valley. There it originated and fostered the first truly religious adjustment of soul and sense. India's mental struggles, moral tragedies and spiritual achievements, coupled with the wrongs she has suffered from civil wars and Moslem invasions, make her Asia's most fascinating nation or rather group of nations. Further, no scientific observation of the material universe can equal in interest the observation of the human soul's emancipation and upward trend. Neither the story of the earth's strata nor that of the galaxies of suns in the heavens can vie in dramatic intensity with the record of man's ceaseless explorations of the Invisible. His many excursions after gods who were more human than humane will have to be better understood by Christians if they expect to secure a worldwide acceptance of their religion. For when India sur-

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<sup>18</sup> Cf. Sydney Cave: *Living Religions of the East*; Edmund D. Soper: *The Religions of Mankind*; Robert E. Hume: *The World's Living Religions*.

renders to the claims of Christ He will have won the world.<sup>19</sup>

Just as that peninsula contains within itself every possible phase of climate, from torrid heat to freezing cold, so it has been the scene of an equally diversified array of religious cults and beliefs. They range from the loftiest of speculations in the *Vedas*, the *Upanishads* and the *Bhagavadgita* to the maze of primeval superstitions among the despised millions of "untouchables." The *Vedas* are among the earlier tributes to creative wisdom, in which the meditative mind, inspired by imagination, renders praise in lyrical forms to the source of all being. In the *Upanishads*, philosophical discussions of the doctrines of rebirth and Karma are pursued with a freedom of thought somewhat startling to our modern conventional ways. The aim of these dissertations was to explain the problem of reality and to discover the Absolute, the Brahman Atman, which is the source and stability of the universe. The *Bhagavadgita*, a didactic epic poem, is one of the earliest attempts in India to formulate a theology for a theistic faith. But it is in the *Brahmanas* that the essentially sacerdotal tradition of Hinduism is expounded with a curious combination of ritualistic directions, puerile speculations and religious precepts. For an insight into the religion of the common people we must however go to the two great epics, the *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana*. They were to Hindu thought what the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* were to Greek thought. They exhibit the evolution and the devolution of Hinduism. With them should be read the *Puranas*, which are religious stories dealing with the popular beliefs of

<sup>19</sup> Cf. E. Stanley Jones: *The Christ of the Indian Road*.



Hinduism far more impressively than the philosophical treatises. Similarly the *Jatakas* or birth stories of Gautama Buddha give a better account of the practical creed of Buddhism than the ethical precepts and religious metaphysics of the *Tripitakas*.<sup>20</sup>

The huge and hideous images, shrines and temples of India devoted to the worship of demons and bloodthirsty gods are concrete testimonies to its mutilated faith. They offer no genuine relief either to the submerged millions or to the *elite* who belong to the higher castes. Such structures as the Taj Mahal are not congenital to Hinduism, but belong to the architectural lineage which produced the Alhambra in Spain. The cave temples of Elephanta are characteristic specimens of native art. One has only to compare their stupendous massiveness with the spacious loveliness and graceful strength of the cathedrals of Chartres and Lincoln to realize the difference between Hindu and Christian beliefs. The former are inhospitable, soulless, unchastened by spiritual restraint; heaps of sheer bulk which finally vulgarized the Hindu mind and laid it low. They typify the primeval forces regardless of the protests of that sense of proportion which is but justice done in stone and marble. Their tyrannical regnancy is more poignantly expressed in the doctrines of Illusion and Retribution, and in the theory of Transmigration which casts its black pall over Hinduism's devotees.<sup>21</sup>

Pass now to Egypt, where the deserts bordering on the Nile enclose a fertile strip crowded with

<sup>20</sup> Cf. J. N. Farquhar: *An Outline of the Religious Literature of India*, p. 27 ff.; J. M. Macfie: *Myths and Legends of India*.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. P. T. Forsyth: *Christ on Parnassus*, p. 7 ff.

some of the richest spoils of Time. The untamed powers of Nature that confounded Hinduism prevailed here also, but to a diminished extent. The discoveries of archæology are a veritable re-reading of Egypt's *Book of the Dead*.<sup>22</sup> Its Temples and Pyramids reveal Hindu influence, albeit with essential modifications. Nature's awful front no longer looms up as it did in the Ganges Valley and under the barriers of the Himalayas. It has been softened by an imagination that could not only worship the sun but utilize it. The sandy plains stretching along the Nile valley were the Egyptian's trestle boards on which he drew the designs for his priestly cities and his royal tombs. He embodies his dauntless challenge of Nature's eternal mysteries in the Sphynx, half beast and half woman. Could one wrest from that image the secret of her serene and timeless gaze into the boundless beyond, he would know the ancient tyrannies and anticipated deliverances of which she is the universal symbol. Egyptian belief in immortality balanced the inequalities of the present life and intensified the predominance of the spiritual. Externalism was contradicted by every mummy which spoke of the soul's return to tenant it. Another and a superior world was kept in the forefront through these forms and customs; a world in which an infallible tribunal vindicated the just and perpetuated the triumphs of the Egyptian priest kings.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>22</sup> Cf. James Baikie: *A Century of Excavation in the Land of the Pharaohs*; Howard Carter and A. C. Mace: *The Tomb of Tut-Ankh-Amen*.

<sup>23</sup> Cf. James Henry Breasted: *A History of Egypt. From the Earliest Times to the Persian Conquest*.

This amelioration of the dread of Nature's forces by an emancipating imagination consumed centuries before the time was ripe for a new and a better civilization. At last, in the Greek Archipelago of the Mediterranean's northern shores, man ceased to visualize himself as the slave of his environment. There he built those impregnable fortresses of the mind which are still strong enough to shelter some of its most valuable acquisitions. There he created for every realm of human activity interpretative forms and images to which civilized nations have since had to repair for light and guidance. The Greek conceived himself a free citizen of all worlds, and acted upon that conception. His proud consciousness of equality with Nature was the boldest mental conquest of classic antiquity, if we except the contributions of the Hebrew Psalmists and Prophets. His felicitous language lent itself to the intellectual and æsthetic marvels which he produced. It was the speech of liberty, lawfulness, and experiment, adapted to the purposes of debate and oratory. The Greek enthronement of reason as against violence in thought or in deed teaches us a lesson which modern chauvinists, debauched by the misleading images of brute force, should heed. While the Greek began, like the Hindu and the Egyptian, by supplicating Nature, he ended by appreciating her. He coerced his divinities to share with him his emotions and passions, his vices and virtues. He married his soul to outward phenomena which previous races had dreaded, and thus became the parent of perfect form. His figures were aglow with a cheerful candor and a calm enjoyment which betokened his gay adolescence. Of

course, the glory of it all was too brilliant to endure. Other and severer problems than those raised by Nature were ahead with no solution in sight. Too late to rectify his mistake, the Greek found that he could not live by art and intelligence alone, or Athens would have been the universal shrine. Human nature demanded then, as now, dimensions of spirituality which neither intellectual supremacy nor unaided beauty could give. Yet in its day Attic culture made a priceless contribution to poetry, dramatics, philosophy, ethics and politics, and established a sovereignty in æsthetics which it still maintains.<sup>24</sup> The flow of Hellenism into the Hebraism of the early Christian Church humanized its creeds and rebuked its provincialism. Before the dream of a united Ecclesia ever comes true, we shall have to recognize the fact that though art overshadowed religion in Greece it also infused religion with the holiness of beauty.<sup>25</sup>

In retrospect, memory sometimes tells as flattering a tale as hope; a maxim verified by this rapid survey of mythological backgrounds. It ought to counsel us, however, that "he that believeth shall not make haste." If man has come so long and so far on these long spiral paths, ascending from such depths as we have glimpsed, it would seem presumptuous and artificial to hasten that progress. He is pledged to arrive, if only by the interminable process of his religious evolution. As the product of so costly an enterprise he is entirely too valuable to

<sup>24</sup> Cf. *The Legacy of Greece*, edited by R. W. Livingstone; Maurice Hutton: *The Greek Point of View*.

<sup>25</sup> Cf. Edwin Hatch: *The Influence of Greek Ideas and Usages upon the Christian Church*; William Fairweather: *Jesus and the Greeks*.

be assigned to a premature extinction which he does not altogether deserve. Nor do we know, whatever may be surmised, that our present boasted status is anything more than provisional. Even science is confessedly a series of hypotheses, and its ripest conclusions are undergoing constant revision. If man at the dawn of consciousness tried to make terms with his environment by the use of magic, and failing so to do, adopted religion, must he at the last substitute science for religion? Is this the inevitable outcome which imagination conceives and the race confronts? The reply, though a *non sequitur*, is irresistible, namely, that if magic has slain its thousands, science, tied to war's bloody munitions and chemicals, has slain its tens of thousands. Those who uphold science as the final rounding out of humanity's culture insist that imagination is not safe except in partnership with organized knowledge, for therein is its legitimate use and profitable service. But there is no finality in knowledge, nor could it advance a step, without the aid of imagination. This is why the human heart will not allow imagination to be divorced from religion, nor suffer it to cease its explorations until it has found a habitation of rest and peace for the souls of men. We must therefore avoid the conceit that our order is *the* order. It is only one link in an endless chain which answers its purposes if it does not snap. Man and the universe are still somewhat raw, incomplete, in the making. The highest significance of human life regarded as a gradual deliverance from despair and futility into the liberty of the sons of God is still far short of its fulfilment. Who can conceive the condition



of Europe or America six hundred years hence? By that time civilizations we now rank supreme may have arisen and disappeared. But human nature is essentially the same at every stage of the development. Its growth demands not only science but religion and all knowledge, faith and duty consecrated in Christ and to the service of God.

Nevertheless, Sir James G. Frazer foresees that the black thread of magic will continue intertwined with the red thread of religion and the white thread of science in the tricolored web the Fates are ever weaving on the loom of Time. He raises the query whether the red or the white shall distinguish the fabric of the human lot, but he leaves it unanswered. "The Golden Bough" has vanished; so has the goddess Diana and her warrior priest. But the woods of Nemi remain and renew their leaves, while in the distance from the church bells of Aricia floats the chime of the Angelus.<sup>26</sup> So Nature and Religion, the seen and the unseen, perpetually wait upon imagination for fuller interpretation of their significance. What vastness of treasure the modern material universe presents to the believing mind! Warned by Hinduism's tragedy, we cannot allow it to crush our inner self nor see in it anything less than the robe of a friendly Deity. Not as outside Nature, nor yet within the pantheistic prison of its physical aspects, but as the Redeemer of its stupendous frame and Lord alike of the cosmos and of man, does the Everlasting Father reveal Himself in Christ. Here is an effec-

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<sup>26</sup> Cf. *The Golden Bough*, p. 713 f.

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tual opening for His messengers to show His life flooding every space and beating in every element of creation. To take full advantage of this opportunity a renaissance of the imagination, such as classic Greece experienced, will be required. Then, and not till then, will "a sense sublime of something far more deeply interfused," be the superscription and the sanction of your message.

## CHAPTER V

### IMAGINATION AND THE BIBLE

The Bible touches every phase of human life—Primeval cults and prophetic sublimations are found in its pages—Folklore and mythology form its background but the central fact is the One and True God of a progressive revelation—The unique glory of the New Testament—The epic of Genesis—The Psalter—The Book of Job—The prophets—The preacher's use of the disciplined imagination for the interpretation of the Book.

No literature gives the lie direct to pessimistic predictions about man as does that contained in the sixty-six books of the Bible. From first to last it is unreservedly identified with every phase of his being; the more divine because it is the most human of all the religious oracles. It invests mankind's manifold pursuits and interests with the loftiest ethical principles and spiritual imageries. History, biography, poetry, drama, discourse, parable, proverb and epistle are forms of the apparatus used in this process. Fortunately for its universal appeal, the technical terms of philosophy, psychology, sociology and kindred branches of ancient or modern learning are not found in the Bible, although their essential ingredients are there in abundance. But it is primarily *the* book of religion; the preëminent soul moving record of God's self-disclosure to man.

of man's response to that disclosure and of the consequent responsibility which he sustains toward his Maker and his fellow men in every relationship of life. These weighty matters are conveyed in a current of experience which at its full tide flows from the heart of the Eternal and sweeps all before it. As star to star vibrates light, so the choicest passages of Holy Scripture grip the soul of the devout reader with a sacred tension. The sense of their supernal holiness holds one in a circle dominated to its circumference by the grace and wisdom peculiar to this Book. Earthly impossibilities dissolve at the touch of exaltation which it imparts to one's nature. Mental bewilderment and moral uncertainty cease at the entrance of its words of light; they end the tossing to and fro of vain imaginations and desires. There are breathless moments of inspiration in the Psalms, the Prophecies and the Gospels, which can only be compared with those quiet intervals of the saint's burning passion for perfect life when vision, conviction, will and purpose are absorbed in the consciousness of God as the Infinite Goodness.

And yet the primeval cults and rituals of the race have left their indelible traces upon the earlier literature of the Bible. As the earth's underlying strata and mountain ridges give evidence that volcanic upheavals, alluvial deposits, and glacial action have been at work, so do these ancient writings reveal the vestigial remains of primitive imagination. Revolting specters and bright angelic forms move through their remoter sceneries. The patriarchs and law givers of the Book were unsophisticated and trustful, with a vision which often viewed the world beyond from areas of low visi-

bility. They reflect in its documents their contacts with polytheistic tribes and malignant deities; their ages of innocence, of awakening apprehension, and of knowledge. The Bible's production covered many centuries which are related sections of the human story, eddies formed upon and absorbed by the mighty stream of living energy forever flowing through history's developments. The progressive disclosure of God's purposes in the Book ascends steadily from aboriginal cultisms to the purest idealisms. It may be likened to the coral islands emergent from the expanse of southern seas that now bear stately palm trees and fragrant flowers and provide shelter for storm driven vessels. As countless myriads of living organisms formed the hidden structure of the coral reef, so countless lesser concepts of humanity are sublimated by the revelations of Holy Writ.

Upon the human and imaginative side it resembles *The Bee*, by Maeterlinck. Legends that once roamed in free flight, as does that procreating insect, were captured by the Biblical writers to express divine verities which they apprehended beneath the constraint of the Spirit of God. Their thoughts and words, while typical of the Orient and of its beliefs and customs, were inspired of Heaven in respect to their spiritual insight and authority. So far from being provincial they have become universal, with a mission for all races and creeds and an intimate personal approach to the individual which makes the Book his companion and counsellor. It is everywhere sensitive to the permanent differences between cruelty and mercy, vice and virtue, ignorance and knowledge. Lust calls loud in some of its pages, as though unwill-



ing to relinquish its ancient prey. But Love calls louder and eventually prevails. Emotions that had been thrown back upon themselves to breed either irrational hopes or blank despair were directed by the Bible to their rightful Object. Affections were released from inordinacy and agitation to seek an outlet in holiness and peace. Life became less timid and less futile after legislators and prophets lit the lamps which showed their fellow men an Absolute Being who was also the All-Loving and the All-Wise. They descended from the mystery of that Being to the common run of things, describing these with picturesqueness of allusion and detail, and relating them to His will. Profound agreement with that Will characterizes their utterances and gives them lasting significance.

In the Bible as an articulated unity the human race is also indemnified for its previous courageous and costly explorations of the unseen. Imagination had cluttered up the ageless process with curious or grotesque and terror inspiring devices of its own. Under divine guidance these fabulous creations were recreated. They assumed fresh shapes and were made to subserve man's love, his faith and his adoration. Nearly every tendency of its foremost writers was reconciling or illuminative. They laid many a ghost that had haunted the mind and blighted the will to believe to any good purpose. They spoke and wrote with the eagerness of singers, seers, dreamers; the morning light flashed on their spirits; they sighted afar the new City of God. Yet these generalizations can be pushed too far, since the Biblical authors were also annalists, moralists, and after a fashion, metaphysicians. Their messages have the values of permanence be-

cause they clarify man's vision of the everlasting righteousness. In them intellectual cogency is often pushed aside to make room for enraptured bursts of praise, prediction, denunciation, exhortation; or for passionate rhapsodies that show how little divine truth sometimes depends for its realization upon man's reasoning mind. Their prophetic utterances were drenched in the authority of the living Jehovah and proclaimed as personal communications from Him.

When Horace Bushnell referred to the Gospels as a divine gift to the human imagination, he might well have included in his reference the Psalms, the Prophecies and the major histories of the Old Testament. They reveal man's conflict with the tremendous evils which imagination, hag-ridden by heathen craft and superstition, had brought upon Israel and contemporary nations. In the Bible as a whole, however, imagination won victories long since vindicated by their beneficial results. The Book is therefore to be interpreted with discretion, as a literature, which, if divinely inspired, was humanly composed. Its ineffable music should not be marred by the discords of dogmatists whose estimates of its values are erroneous in many respects. Its incomparable idealizations were not intended to serve as proof texts in support of formal propositions. Its sublime delineations of character are caricatured rather than represented by those who conceive them as artificially perfect portraitures, cold and dead as sculptured marble. Interpretations that make no allowance for the flexibility, the humanness and the vital freedom in the Scriptures transgress the law of the Spirit that inspired them. They also ignore

their literary characteristics and fail to appreciate the power of their truly divine origin. Sincere and godly men menace what they mean to defend, when they fail to see that such briefs for the Bible rather throw its case out of court. Beware of efforts to degrade its poetry into prose, its symbolism into pseudo science, its wholesome naturalness into morbid occultism. Receive with gladness its radiance proceeding from the superb imagination on which its Supreme Giver first upraised the light of Holy Scripture.

The course of its divine revelation, moreover, had no precise beginning and has no definite terminals. It arose out of previous legends and visions into the unveiling of God in Christ, who completed the process. Neither science nor theology can confine its prolonged and chequered career within the limitations set by human systems. Like the waters of a river which are always there yet never there, so the various streams of literature that flow into the Bible's oceanic dimensions elude the efforts of scholars to determine all their actions and reactions. The human spirit's excursions in unseen realms follow no chartings of unaided intellectualism. Indeed, intellectualism's chief task in all realms of knowledge, sacred or secular, is to connect man's present with his past progression and to use the information thus acquired for his future progress. This principle applies to the Bible because it is so deeply embedded in our human story. When we ask whether it manifests a divine supervision of that story, the answers of faith and reason are practically unanimous in the affirmative. Science and religion can therefore legitimately unite in the task of explaining the Bible. Indeed,

no constructive explanation is possible without such a combination. Science verifies human experiences of the visible, and religion reveals to humanity the purpose and guidance of the invisible. We need not attribute to science a fictitious preëminence nor wrongly emphasize the function of religion. If science protects religion against undue emotionalism and superstition, religion protects science against mechanistic blunders and materialistic blindness. Both are acolytes of the creative evolution which rules impartially between contending sectarians. Already some of the crudest primitivisms have been transformed and given a place of honor in our historic and regenerative Faith. The process thus happily begun can be relied upon to finish the task for which its unremitting forces have been ordained.

The argument is strengthened by frankly conceding that no Biblical author so forfeited his individuality as to become merely the medium of a divine hypnosis. Innumerable legends encompassed these writings in their origin, and their unique elevation is due to the contrast between them and this stupendous belt of secondary matter. Much of the latter possesses solely an antiquarian interest for us, yet nowhere has it sunk below the level of curiosity. We thus learn that imagination in religion needs the divine stimulus and oversight if it is not to sever its connections with spiritual realities. But the legends that have survived in Scripture must be differentiated from the fable, the romance and the myth. Those legends were Israel's consolation because a seraphic fire burned in them and ennobled the meanest heart on which it descended. They brought into high relief the intellectual, moral and religious conditions of the chosen people.

They showed that the Hebrew's imagination was a competent instrument of transmission for God's revelatory aims. His language was preëminently fitted for the poetic expression of things invisible. The picturesque physical and historical environments of his nation and its leaders lent intensity and color to sacred forms and symbols. These were preserved from fanciful or vicious vagaries by a severe ethical restraint.<sup>1</sup> The prophets anticipated the truth of Dante's immortal maxim: "In His Will is our peace." Taught by experience the truth of Newman's great dictum: "To be at ease is to be unsafe," they climbed with unfaltering feet the dizzyest summits of dream and vision. Their far-ranging ideas spanned the widest abysses between the Infinite and the finite. Their quest ended in conquest, and the long night of preparation gave way to the dawn that was finally merged into the day of Christ. As the sky is the canopy of the earth, so their conception of the one and holy God as the moral Sovereign of the universe overarches the religious life of mankind. All nations must eventually come to the brightness of that concept as centered for Christians in the Incarnation of their Lord and Redeemer.<sup>2</sup>

The unbending witness of Israel to the Jehovah of the covenant forbids the acceptance of the prejudiced notion that Judaism is merely an Oriental cult, destined to remain alien or aloof from civilization's future. Its contribution of monotheism

<sup>1</sup> Cf. J. H. McIvor: *The Literary Study of the Prophets*, p. 59 ff. Charles A. Dinsmore: Article, "The Literary Qualities of the English Bible," *Education for Christian Service*, p. 113 ff.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Edward Pace: *Ideas of God in Israel*; Albert C. Knudson: *The Religious Teaching of the Old Testament*.



to the world's faith far exceeds in benefit any contribution made by Hindu mysticism, Greek philosophy or Roman legalism. Upon it, as upon a rock, Israel has based her reverence and love for the Law received out of Sinai's thunderings. During two thousand years Roman Catholic and Protestant have given their allegiance to that Law as the theocratic ideal of society. Its mandates are engraven on the conscience of enlightened Christendom more lastingly than if etched upon enduring bronze. Its promises animated our own ancestors in their numerous migrations and adventures. They knew the noble appeal of the second Isaiah's Evangel: "Hast thou not known? hast thou not heard? The everlasting God, Jehovah, the Creator of the ends of the earth, fainteth not, neither is weary; there is no searching of His understanding." <sup>3</sup> Such words as these were their spiritual sustenance in critical moments and in epochs fertile for good.

## II

From the Hebrew prophets and psalmists to the religious teachers and preachers of today God has been interpreted and misinterpreted both by what is best and worst in man. The savageries of cannibalism and the almost more savage and needless wars of civilization alike have invoked the Deity in their behalf. Oriental nations for ages conceived Him as a despotic tyrant, insatiate in his demands for homage and swift to execute vengeance. Truly, if God made man in His own image, man has marred God's image in himself by his own mak-

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<sup>3</sup> Isaiah xl. 28.

ings. His ideas of right, duty and control over environment deeply affect all his thought of the Eternal One. The work of imagination in the creations of mythology is an example of these human efforts to picture God according to the apprehensions of surrounding life and circumstance. The body of traditions bound up in these creations took shape in the numberless ceremonialisms of elaborate rituals. Often without rationalized forms, yet full of intense feeling, they furnished a psychological *milieu* which contained some small promise of a reasonable worship. On the fringes of this body of received traditions circled other legends and tales of given groups and tribes.<sup>4</sup> Folklore depicted their hallucinations, beliefs and customs with a collective rather than an individual reference which was almost entirely emotional. The development hinted at here hung upon the image making power for the reason that men have never clung tenaciously to anything that could not be vividly represented to the mind. On the other hand, in his revolt against these simpler processes, the sophisticated modern takes doubtful refuge in abstract conceptions. Abominating all religions even more than they detest the historians and morphologists of science, some devotees of pure mechanism reduce these ancient spiritual romances to absurdity and occasionally proceed to spin still more fantastic speculations of their own.

The religious situation of the world today upholds the superiority of Hebrew monotheism to all other past and present creeds except that of Christianity, and many Christians realize

<sup>4</sup> Cf. E. S. Ames: *The Psychology of Religious Experience*, p. 166.

the vital relation between Hebraism and Christianity. Israel's faith epitomized human life and focused some of its purest ideals in a personal God. It found its essence in awe, its beauty in reverence, its dominion in the certitude it gave to the unseen. Art in any but its literary forms was sterilized for centuries within Israel's borders by its conception of the Everlasting One. That conception was so ethereal and intangible that it absolutely forbade the use of sensuous symbols of His glory. The Hebrew's adoration was reserved for the heart, the mind and the will as the only temples worthy of the Divine Presence. The documents of his truly great religion are badly scarred at intervals by massacres, infidelities and idolatries.. But who in all the amplitude of time has equalled the Hebrew Prophets' vision of God? What people has produced a literature so charged with the forces that support man's initiation into divine realities? There are some who denounce the Bible, specifically the Old Testament, as a detrimental book, and who urge that its reading should be quietly discouraged. It is arraigned with unsparing invective and indiscriminate abuse as the record of an outworn world committed to tribalism and human sacrifices. The earlier Scriptures are further impeached as emphasizing indelicacy in God and man, as fostering ignorance, priestcraft and unscrupulous selfishness, and therefore, as the latent source of much modern turpitude and wrong-doing. One is tempted to quote to these accusers Augustine Birrell's delightful words: "Brother asses," he writes in one of his essays, "lend me your ears, that I may whisper into their furry depths. Do not let us quarrel with genius. We have none ourselves, but are so consti-

tuted that we cannot live without it." What are the complacent criticisms of such ephemerides in comparison with those profound instincts that govern our universal life and find in this Book matchless ideals, not only of Deity, but of man's moral obligation? So far from banishing God to regions beyond the reach of human reason and spiritual necessity, the Bible has brought Him into closest sympathy with them. "Instead of setting God outside life and calmly above it, it poured Him, as it were, into life, loaded Him with its mystery, its sadness, its pity, even its horror, and charged Him with the burden of its release."<sup>5</sup> Its anthropomorphisms, which some critics minimize and others deplore, served the Hebrews as vehicles of their grandest ideas. Its frank acceptance of similarities between the Creator and the creature had honorable uses. By these human symbols the Biblical writers measurably apprehended the Eternal Spirit whom none had seen or could see apart from the help of such methods.

Not all tributes of affectionate reverence paid to the Bible intelligently testify to its genuine marvel. By far the greatest event in man's moral history is the unveiling of God's Nature begun by its prophets and perfected by our Lord. That it should have been wrought out by a primitive and uncultured people entitles the achievement to miraculous rank. The Hebrew had no Socrates to insist that for him knowledge was virtue; no Plato to refine his transcendentalisms; no Aristotle to drill his image making powers into logical consistency. Yet he gained an experimental under-

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<sup>5</sup> P. T. Forsyth: *Christ on Parnassus*, p. 32.

standing of God's character which has vitalized nearly every religious value in the nearer Orient and in the entire Occident. Israel's unity as a nation composed of kings and priests, designed by Jehovah to be His mouthpiece and minister, is the model for democracies which expect to survive. Sir James G. Frazer asserts that the baser relics of heathenism found in Hebrew literature were "a foil to enhance by contrast the glory of a people which, from such dark depths of ignorance and cruelty, could rise to such bright heights of wisdom and virtue, as sunbeams appear to shine with a greater effulgence of beauty when they break through the murky clouds of a winter evening than when they flood the earth from the serene splendor of a summer noon. The annals of savagery and superstition unhappily compose a large part of human literature; but in what other volume shall we find, side by side with that melancholy record, psalmists who poured forth their sweet and solemn strains of meditative piety in the solitude of the hills or in green pastures and beside still waters; prophets who lit up their beatific visions of a blissful future with the glow of an impassioned imagination; historians who bequeathed to distant ages the scenes of a remote past embalmed for ever in the amber of a pellucid style?"

The future of the New Testament is secure from the viewpoint of a vigorous and informed imagination. Despite what skeptics and some scholars may say in disparagement of its conceptions, its style and its distinctive doctrines, it places the race in the heart of God's purpose through Christ as Lord. This

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\* *Folk Lore in the Old Testament* (abridged edition), p. xii.



purpose will be man's chief concern so long as he conceives godliness to be life's chief good, for which he must ever strive if he would really live at all. Enlightened thinkers have defined the divine intention in regard to man in various ways. Cicero said that it was to make human existence richer and safer; Posidonius, that it was to keep humanity safe; St. Paul, that it was the believer's vital union with God in His Crucified and Risen Son. Our Lord bestowed His sanction on the Apostle's conception in the announcement: "I came that they may have life, and may have it abundantly."<sup>7</sup> In these words, thought and imagination enter into partnership to communicate the divine intention to men in the Person of Christ.

At the time He appeared, God was far removed in the popular estimation from man and regarded with an awe akin to superstition and tintured with dread. The sacred name Jehovah, with its vivid connotation of personality and intercourse, was never used. Even the substitute name "God" had been supplanted by makeshift terms, such as the "Almighty," the "Holy One," or "Heaven," which fenced Him off at an indisturbable distance from man. Colorful rites and meticulous ordinances disguised the bankruptcy of spiritual imagism. The vanities of a hair-splitting casuistry concealed the inability for fellowship with God. It was Jesus who unveiled God as the all encompassing Father, overflowing with perfect and sympathetic knowledge of His offspring and revealing them to themselves that He might raise them above themselves. The clearest, choicest insight of psalmists and

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<sup>7</sup> St. John x. 10.

prophets were but foreshadowings of the radiance that emanated from the Christ. He persuaded guilty sinners to trust their capacity to know the hitherto unknowable Deity and to enjoy Him forever. The shackles of ignorance and fear which paralyzed the heart were shattered by His teachings. Man's sense of an insuperable alienation was abolished. God ceased to be shrouded in a gloomy mystery which aroused terror, or so enshrined in omnipotent wisdom as to be indifferent to the human appeal. Priesthoods and their gorgeous paraphernalia were deemed negligible by those who heard and believed the words of Jesus. He opened up the blind alley and showed its path from earth to heaven. His password of emancipation was life: life that responded in obedience and service, not at the instigation of rewards or penalties but in the atmosphere of the Father's love and entranced by the vision of His perfection.

The directness and simplicity of our Lord's references to God were born of spiritual intimacy rather than of the reasoning intellect. It expressed deep-seated assurance and was opposed to vague sentimentalism. His knowledge of God was the fruit of a filial consciousness which gave Him immediate and unbroken companionship with the "Holy Father." The preacher who accepts Jesus on His own terms as the Christ of God finds in Him the surprise of wonder, the joyousness of hope, the exhilaration of faith, the inspiration of love. He so reflects the divine mind as to invigorate the whole brotherhood on earth. The God He reveals clothes the smiling fields with corn, arrays the lilies in a loveliness infinitely exceeding that of the Solomonic monarchy and cares for everything He has

made. How much more does He desire the restoration of His children to peace and happiness in Himself! This "sense of fact and the gift for sympathy are the foundations, so to speak, of the imagination which gives their quality to the stories and pictures of Jesus."<sup>8</sup> Amid the somber solemnities of New Testament literature there reigns an exultant joy foreign to the temporal world. Triumphant gladness breaks out in the saddest music of the tragedy of the Passion. The Dayspring from on High gleams through the recitals and reasonings of Evangels and Epistles. The humanism of Jesus, as portrayed in the Synoptic Gospels, becomes the more conspicuous when we recall that His first followers were commonplace peasants who owed their religious importance to their contact with Him. What a romance their discipleship displays at every stage! Think of the scenes in Galilee and Judæa, or in the upper room before and after the Crucifixion. Think of St. Stephen who saw his Master standing at God's right hand to receive the first martyr of the new-born Church. Think of the man from Macedonia whom St. Paul saw in that vision which signified a reorientation of religious life in Asia Minor and later in Europe and America. Let your picturing powers center upon the personal salutations of the Epistles and accompany the missionaries of the Cross in their perilous wanderings throughout the Roman Empire. Call back to life these people, places, events; reclothe them in their rightful habiliments of moral and religious power; introduce to your congregations the prominent figures of that Evangel and its obscure and

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<sup>8</sup> T. R. Glover: *The Jesus of History*, p. 55.

persecuted zealots. For these humble men became the masters of a new order of humanity.<sup>9</sup> The New Testament is the smallest religious classic of the great religions, but it is the most important and indispensable one. Well might Dr. Adolf Deissmann's estimate of it rise to eloquence: "A book from the ancient East, and lit up by the light of the dawn,—a book breathing the fragrance of the Galilean spring, and anon swept by the shipwrecking northeast tempest from the Mediterranean,—a book of peasants, fishermen, artisans, travellers by land and sea, fighters and martyrs,—a book in cosmopolitan Greek with marks of Semitic origin,—a book of the Imperial age, written at Antioch, Ephesus, Corinth, Rome,—a book in pictures, miracles and visions, book of the village and the town, book of the people and the peoples,—the New Testament, if regard be had to the inward side of things, is the great book, chief and singular, of human souls. Because of its psychic depth and breadth this book of the East is a book for both East and West, a book for humanity: a book ancient but eternal. And because of the figure that emerges from the book,—the Redeemer, accompanied by the multitude of the redeemed, blessing and consoling, exhorting and renewing, revealing Himself anew to every generation of the weary and heavy laden, and growing from century to century more great—the New Testament is the Book of Life."<sup>10</sup>

Yet in the face of this conclusive testimony by one of the foremost scholars of the Christian

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<sup>9</sup> Cf. James Alex. Robertson: *The Hidden Romance of the New Testament*.

<sup>10</sup> *Light from the Ancient East*, p. 399 ff.

Church, let me add that the essentials of a convincing theology for us cannot be obtained from the Book alone. That theology must be sought in the atmosphere and temper in which it was written, and in the creative imagination of its writers. Its words are more than words; they are "spirit and life." Its authors were not verbalists for grammarians to dissect, but full blooded, virile, dedicated personalities breathed upon by the breath of God. Preaching which takes shelter in the trenches of literalism, sedulously defending either orthodoxy or heterodoxy, should exchange its feeble tactics for a broad, vital pulpit strategy. New and vaster perspectives of the Christian religion lie before the visioned minister. He does not have to clutch, like a falling man at a rope, at a few hackneyed themes empirically dubbed modernist or fundamentalist. These overworked and misleading titles can well be discarded as so much impedimenta. He understands that the dramatic situations and meanings which cluster around our Lord's Incarnation require a fresh setting to do them full justice. He need not go beyond the Evangel itself, except fully to avail himself of every resource of scholarship. But he must transmute all his gains in his imagination and bring into the pulpit the devoutness of soul which exhibits the gains to advantage. On the other hand, an intelligent competency for his calling is not shown by the minister who peddles the wonders of the Gospel as though they were an old wives' tale. Whatever vision of Divine Life and Truth he ever had has deserted him. He needs to rejuvenate his imaginative gift, but above all he needs a deepening experience of those divine realities which recreate it. This can be supplied by a more intimate



and accurate acquaintance with the Bible.<sup>11</sup> The purest and most efficient forms of Protestantism have come by its faithful study. So began the Society of Friends in the seventeenth century under George Fox, that aristocrat of God; and the Methodism of the eighteenth century under John Wesley, the foremost evangelical statesman of the modern period.<sup>12</sup>

Moreover, the Book links the prosaic phases of human life to its infinitudes. The holiest mysteries of the unseen blend into the domestic affairs of Syrian towns and villages. It interweaves the wisdom of the Spirit into the beliefs, habits and speech of the plain folk of the Palestinian provinces. Hence its western readers have many fixed habits to overcome, and perforce must put their minds into an unaccustomed harness if they would appreciate the simplicity which is in Christ and in His words. A. M. Rihbany justly insists that we should discount the aggressive and systematic attempts of some modern interpreters "to press into logical unity and creedal uniformity those undesigned, artless, and most natural manifestations of Oriental life, in order to understand the Scriptures."<sup>13</sup> What such interpreters require is a liberated visualizing faculty. Without it they will continue to fall into incongruities, misapprehensions and wrong conclusions, detrimental alike to their understanding of the issues involved and to the souls of men and women.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. A. C. Deane: *How to Enjoy the Bible*, p. 11 ff.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. the author's *The Three Religious Leaders of Oxford and Their Movements*, p. 177 ff.

<sup>13</sup> *The Syrian Christ*, p. 2.

## III

Later interpreters of God who have neither stumbled in their approach to Scriptural sublimities nor robbed them of their richness, excel in two respects. They have the reasoned use of faith and the depicting power of a vivid imagination. Consider their successful treatment of a few of the Bible's more prominent documents. The first chapter of Genesis can be regarded as "a splendid prologue to the whole history of the revelation, through which the belief in one God has been given to the world."<sup>14</sup> Unlike the contemporary Babylonian cosmogony, this dignified poem of creation goes straight back to the Almighty, the Ultimate, with the announcement of that fiat of Creative Will: "Let there be light: and there was light." The formative principle which science in our age has detected at work in a primordial shapelessness is here described as the Spirit of God brooding upon a chaos dark and rude. By a flash of genius the poet of this noble epic of antiquity has a premonition of the radiance now understood as ether: the mercurial medium whose vibrations constitute light, a universal property uniting stars and planets and transmitting its energies throughout the known universe.<sup>15</sup> By another flash of genius he surveys the progression from cosmic chaos to cosmic order, completed in the creation of man as its subsidiary agent and its ultimate explanation. The intelligence, freedom and responsibility conferred upon him separ-

<sup>14</sup> W. G. Jordan: *Ancient Hebrew Stories and Their Modern Interpretation*, p. 73.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. Sir Oliver Lodge: *Ether and Reality*.

ated him from the animal kingdom and introduced him to infinite possibilities of moral development. His innocence speedily vanished with the dawn of his consciousness of a Supreme Power which challenged his evil propensities. Then came the sense of guilt and condemnation. The dire consequences of volition were next realized, and the strife then begun still rages. Bovine placidity and contentment were forfeited; paradisaical tranquillity was abandoned under pressure; the solid foundations on which a progressive and moralized humanity builds were laid. The imagination which hitherto had well served the seer in his explanation of the past also clarified his vision of the future. From the seed of Eve should spring out of these earlier disasters a Redeemer who would be the corner stone of the real Paradise of man's spiritual freedom.

Those who seek either to mutilate this epic of Creation by insisting that its stanzas are a transcript of the actually historic, or to belittle its superb recital as contrary to the discoveries of modern science, are alike intellectually at fault. Neither science nor poetry can tell us what Time is, or imagine a realm in which it is not. No scholarship can go behind the scenes and trace the secret courses of creative evolution, or do more than perceive its results visible at different stages. Interminable stretches of its ageless operations are as yet absolutely unknown to the human mind. Yet science is the outer court of God's House where trained observers discern the laws of Nature. And religion is its inner shrine where the human spirit visualizes the Unseen and experiences divine responses to its deepest needs.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Cf. J. Arthur Thomson: *Science and Religion*, p. 3 ff.

Numerous dogmas have crystallized round this ancient hymn to Creation, but neither the orthodox misinterpretations of its symphonic breadth of treatment nor the banalities inflicted upon it by unimaginative minds can dim its splendor. It is a composite woven out of legends and traditions, kindred to others which have since been collected from many quarters of the globe. But as a poem it exceeds them all, if only for its revelation of the God immanent in all things, who moved upon whatever was to make it what it ought to be. Its two differing accounts fired the genius of Milton in poetry and of Haydn in music. Its general outlines still serve as the creed of the masses of Christendom, because they find in them that attachment to a personal Deity which simple faith demands. The investigations of anatomy, the second oldest science of organized learning, disclose the fact that man has steadily ascended from a lower to a higher state of being. Although ridiculed and caricatured by its opponents, this judgment has advanced beyond the theoretical stage, and the facts that sustain it deserve the courteous consideration of Christians everywhere.<sup>17</sup> Its positions are necessarily tentative in many respects, since anthropology requires prolonged æons to estimate the age of the human race. Experts put that age roughly at half a million years: an unthinkable extension of time which is nevertheless short in comparison with the demands of geology. During its periods man is said to have evolved from an apelike, tree-dwelling, nut-eating creature to his present status. When

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<sup>17</sup> Cf. Henry Fairfield Osborn: *The Origin and Evolution of Life*; Richard Swann Lull: *The Ways of Life*.

we speak, however, of human civilization we should remember that this term includes only the intellectually *elite*. Probably less than ten per cent of the world's total living population know that it is a spheroid body, heliocentric in its motions, and comparatively minute in size. Were a referendum taken, the proposition that the earth is flat and the center of the material universe would probably receive a majority of the votes. There can be no reasonable doubt that our religion owes it to itself and to mankind to redeem this state of ignorance by the further incorporating into its doctrine of creation verified results of science. Galileo pled for this measure in his day and warned the Church which persecuted him that every competent exponent of Nature is as truly God's servant as are His anointed prophets.

What follows? Simply that the same inerrant wisdom which presided over the transformation of gross local superstitions into historic religions also presided over the building of the human body as the tabernacle of a living soul. The epic of Genesis is no more full of fusions of ancient reminiscences in the flame of imagination than the physical frame of its author was compact of nervous, muscular, vascular and glandular systems whose lineage extended back through incalculable ages. Complicated systems of chemical reactions and mechanisms such as produce plant and animal life operate also in every member of our race. They are at work in man's cellular structure from its germ and embryo to its maturity. Each of us is in himself a living epitome of the development of the human species. The Divine Will has ordained that man's finest emotions, his deepest sympathies, his most spacious



ideals and his bodily organism shall be vitally and unbrokenly connected. Those who rightly regard man as the poetry of God's handiwork need not fear the results of this theory. It exhibits throughout a patient assurance, a present moral expansion and a future spiritual possibility worthy of the Creating Mind of the universe. Meanwhile those who esteem imaginative work agree that the poem of Genesis has earned its premiership among the cosmogonies of antiquity.<sup>18</sup>

At this point one is tempted to linger in the patriarchal periods of Scripture, or the "Iron Age" of the Judges, when every one did what was right in his own eyes. The exquisite idyll of Ruth's love story is a welcome oasis in those often brutal eras. The histories of the Jewish monarchy and the growth of Jewish law are subjects of capital importance. But since the work of the imagination in the Bible is our theme we must give its poetical books the preference. These are the music makers of divine revelation, the dreamers of dreams who fashioned earth's coming good in their religious romances and trampled down its sodden and degraded empires of the flesh. They exalted the beauty of holiness, married Time to Eternity, laid bare the naked soul of things and frequently reconciled their apparent antagonisms. They spoke with a changeless accent of authority, not as emotionalists alone and seldom as pessimists, but as the upright in heart. They perceived the emptiness of life's pursuits and gains apart from the enrichment

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<sup>18</sup> Cf. S. R. Driver: *The Book of Genesis*, pp. xxxi ff., 19 ff.; John Skinner: *Genesis, The International Critical Commentary*, pp. iii ff., 4 ff.; George A. Barton: *Archæology and the Bible* (fourth edition), p. 251 ff.

of the spirit that dwells in man. For them all existence was meaningless which did not glorify God. The brevity of human life but accelerated their ardor for its spiritual advance. The doom confronted by its material side caused them to cherish the more eagerly its spiritual essences. The immortal, as they visioned it, transcended the mortal. Though the survival of personality beyond bodily death was not expressly taught by all the earlier Old Testament writers, here and there a meditative mind discerned it as in a glass darkly. Their best lyrics and predictions bore no taint of self-interest; their ethic elevated Jewish nationalism as a nucleus for internationalism. They supplied the codes of conduct for oncoming nations and civilizations yet unborn. They often sang or prophesied with a gladness which contemporary evils and disasters could not quench. Ever and anon a mountain of light lifts up its shining head in their moral sceneries. Their reflections upon ethical questions constitute quarries of thought which the reformer and the patriot cannot afford to neglect. Their asperities and intolerances were usually reserved for the lashing of national wickedness and idolatry. Yet pugnacious as their jealousy for the honor of Jehovah and of his chosen people sometimes made them, who could be more human, more tender, more compassionate toward man's shortcomings and frailties than the seers and poets of Israel? In brief, the soul within this glorious choir showed itself equal to every situation. They spoke as much to the benefit of after ages as to their own, so that what they said in poverty, obscurity or affliction has since received many an historic vindication. Hazlitt was correct in his conjecture that

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the translation of the Bible supplied the chief lever for the acquisition of modern freedom by political States. The men and women who had previously imbibed and then applied its teachings established the constitutional government on firm foundations both in the Old World and the New.

It has been well said that that "the poet is the thrice blest favorite of heaven, who to purity of feeling and range of imagination adds the supreme gift of expression."<sup>19</sup> He is a revealer who "teaches us to see and what he shows us is really in the facts. It is not put into them but elicited from them by his intenser sympathy." Herein is the truth of the poetic imagination.<sup>20</sup> The Hebrew language is essentially poetic because it is rich in pictorial verbs. Herder says it is "a very abysm of verbs, a sea of waves, where action ever rolls surging into action." Apart from their divine inspiration, the poets of the Bible were masters of their several situations from the sheepfold to the throne. They had keen psychological insight, and their emphasis upon unseen values remained unsurpassed until Jesus appeared in Galilee. Religious passion was the driving force of these mystics who were also often men of affairs. Some among them possessed that "second sight," which is due to the piercing sympathies of spiritual genius. They discerned the inwardness of palpable or mysterious events, caught their significance, probed human vices and virtues

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<sup>19</sup> Alex. R. Gordon: *The Poets of the Old Testament*, p. 23.

<sup>20</sup> A. Seth Pringle-Pattison: *The Idea of God*, p. 127 f. Professor W. P. Paterson well remarks: "The saints have as a rule had the imaginative cast of mind. The poetic way of thinking has also been characteristic of the founders and the chief apostles of the ethical religions." *The Nature of Religion*, p. 165.

to their recesses. Turn to the Psalter, the preacher's guide in praise and worship, where

"Mercy and truth are met together;  
Righteousness and peace have kissed each other."<sup>21</sup>

In what other hymnary known to mankind are abstract ideas and moral qualities personified as in this single stanza? When one of Israel's lyricists sings of the trees of Jehovah which He has filled with moisture, of the Cedars of Lebanon which He has planted, where the birds build their nests, we are strangely impressed by this bold yet reverent appropriation of Nature for the adoration of its Creator.<sup>22</sup> Where else has the dissolution of man's flesh been as vividly set forth as in the words which the Anglican Liturgy for the dead so memorably enshrines?

"Thou carriest them away as with a flood; they are as a sleep:  
In the morning they are like grass which groweth up.  
In the morning it flourisheth and groweth up;  
In the evening it is cut down, and withereth."<sup>23</sup>

Note the cadences of these reiterations which contrast the brightness and the gloom of life. Observe how delicately they convey a mood of sadness balanced by resignation to the inevitable; a haunting sense of a faith staggered by the universal fate, yet conscious of God's prevenient care. For the Psalter also has its altitudes of trust and courage, its vi-

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<sup>21</sup> lxxxv. 10.

<sup>22</sup> civ. 16 ff.

<sup>23</sup> xc. 5 ff.

sions of God as the source of man's strength. He has stamped His fidelity upon the heavens as the Covenant keeping Deity whose Name is excellent in all the earth. The sun, moon and stars prompt the question:

"What is man, that thou art mindful of him?  
And the son of man, that thou visitest him?"

Its challenge is met by the answer that the Creator has made man a little lower than Himself, and crowned him with glory and honor.<sup>24</sup> The nineteenth Psalm is a first class example of how the singers of Israel draw upon the majesty of the firmament above and the appeal of the divine law to the conscience within in praising their Maker. Both these avenues of divine revelation lead logically to the supplication:

"Let the words of my mouth and the meditations of my  
heart  
Be acceptable in thy sight,  
O Jehovah, my rock, and my redeemer."<sup>25</sup>

Selections could be multiplied indefinitely to confirm the contention that the Psalter, itself the final revision of previous Hebrew hymnaries, is the treasury of masterpieces of sacred poetry. Despite the blemish of its lapses into truculent tribalism and imprecatory stanzas, here are worthier and wider thoughts of God and of human life and destiny than any modern literature contains. The transition from many a volume of present speculations

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<sup>24</sup> viii. 3 ff.

<sup>25</sup> xix. 14.



on things paramount to *The Psalms* is, in the words of Dean Richard William Church, "like passing at one bound from ideas, at best vague, unwavering, uncertain of themselves, to the high ideas which can be formed by the profoundest and most cultivated reason about God and the soul, its law, its end, its good."<sup>26</sup>

Nothing in the Old Testament is more monumental in human thought and faith than the *Book of Job*. Its unknown author was clearly a protagonist of the spiritual of magisterial rank. His work has been compared with the *De Natura Rerum* of Lucretius, the *Prometheus Bound* of Aeschylus and the *Oedipus at Colonus*, the latest and ripest tragedy of Sophocles. For epic interest, dramatic force, lyrical simplicity, rhetorical skill, imaginative power, scenic backgrounds, philosophical thought, scientific observation of nature, moral instinct, sureness of intuition, and above all, for skill in the religious interpretation of the ways of Providence, this poem stands second to no other. It combines high seriousness of matter and debate with grand simplicity of literary structure. It is like a Greek temple of the classic period rising in majesty above the surrounding desert and its ruined cities. Its composition is simple and severe; its structural parts have their definite beginnings and endings, which are linked together by the middle cycle of speeches. Its diction never sinks to the inadequate, notwithstanding the impenetrable mysteries and baffling

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<sup>26</sup> *The Gifts of Civilisation*, p. 289 f. Cf. A. F. Kirkpatrick: *The Book of Psalms*; S. R. Driver: *Studies in the Psalms*; R. E. Prothero: *The Psalms in Human Life*; W. T. Davison, *The Praises of Israel*.

themes which its personnel undertakes to elucidate.<sup>27</sup> Here, as in all legend or history dramatically treated, a single false step from the sublime might land in the ridiculous. Yet that step is not taken. Its primitive forms of reasoning possess enduring merit and show that the conflict between orthodox views and prophetic vision was waged during the far past in much the same manner as now. I shall not attempt to analyze the appeals of Job nor the replies of Jehovah. It suffices to remark that they contain superb deliverances which can never lose their inspired force. The drama includes in its range the God of heaven and the Accuser of diabolic interference, marshalled in a series of addresses which have no rival even in Semitic literature for daring yet appropriate personifications, figures and similitudes.

The hero is ruthlessly imprisoned by his calamities and stung to madness by the unjust accusations and reproaches of ardent but mistaken friends. Yet he escapes from their clutches and forces his way into a new universe of moral freedom. Convinced of the collapse of conventional beliefs in regard to rewards and penalties, Job abandons the standards of the past and openly appeals for more light to the redeeming Jehovah, confident that He will yet vindicate His servant. The chief human value of the book is found in his deliberate assertion: "Till I die I will not put away mine integrity from me."<sup>28</sup> This firmness of faith demonstrates the righteousness of God as inherent in the nature of His true children. The poem also pictures the Almighty as the Ruler who chastens His obedient

<sup>27</sup> Cf. Arthur Quiller-Couch: *On the Art of Reading*, p. 183.

<sup>28</sup> xxvii, 5.

servants for the sake of their perfection. Here is the contrast. Job is interested in religion, and since he values the truth above all else he questions the current inadequate conceptions of God. His friends support the *status quo*. Unimaginative and wedded to tradition, they are bound to force life into the strait jacket of current theological theories. The Divine Voice out of the whirlwind challenges the captious ways and cynical overconfidence of man. This section contains examples of the highest flights of the poetic imagination in its portrayal of the transcendent realities and immensities of the universe.<sup>29</sup> The conclusion is by no means a *non possumus* but rather a timely recall from vagrant speculations to the spirit of reverence and open-mindedness in investigation. The recall is based upon the conviction that truth is its own defense, and that the impartial and comprehensive presentation of its evidences honors God and blesses man.<sup>30</sup>

## IV

The temper of our age is impatient with the prophets of Israel; resentful of their extraordinary visions and ecstasies; and apt to regard them as impulsive advocates of an unnatural religion. Their unforgivable offense is that they have stamped the luxurious and pleasure loving groups of every era with an abject inferiority. They visualized God so

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<sup>29</sup> xxxviii. - xli.

<sup>30</sup> Cf. S. R. Driver and G. B. Gray: *The Book of Job, The International Critical Commentary*, Vol. I. p. L. ff.; A. R. Gordon: *The Poets of the Old Testament*, p. 202 ff.; Mark Rutherford's *Deliverance*, p. 131 ff.; R. G. Moulton: *The Literary Study of the Bible*, p. 3 ff.; A. S. Peake: *Job, The New Century Bible*.

intensely that they became qualified to act as His spokesmen. Their conceptions of righteousness and iniquity were so realistic that these opposites seem to assume physical proportions. They joined good conduct with blessedness, advertised the way of holiness in terms glowing with gladness and denounced sin and idolatry with an almost reckless acerbity. Their setting was thoroughly Oriental, but their sway has been universal and most influential in the Occident, thus making Israel's ancient Scriptures one of the chief sources of modern civilization. Whatever the environment, these outriders for the Lord speak with an accent that will not be denied in maintaining heaven's standards of truth and right. Healthy-minded people everywhere have endorsed their discerning attitude toward the visible and invisible realms. Their combination of sanity and optimism, of idealism and pathos, of moral and spiritual energy remind one of the mountains where they meet the clouds. It seems incredible that their deep-shadowed crags and roseate peaks are the hardened mud of primeval seas or the cooled slag of volcanic furnaces, "of one substance with the dullest clay, but raised by inward forces to that place of proud and seemingly inaccessible glory."<sup>31</sup> The wizardries and incantations of barbarism were likewise the raw material of an Isaiah and an Ezekiel. Borne aloft on the afflatus of a higher inspiration, the prophets attained those moral eminences from which they discerned and proclaimed eternal verities so as to rebuke the evil policies and degrading habits of princes and peoples. Greece holds an exceptional place in culture, but she

<sup>31</sup> T. H. Huxley: *Man's Place in Nature*, p. 104.

failed to visualize the justice of God and she despised the poor and lowly. Rome overcame provincial prejudices with the sword but she also perished by it. Israel's seers possessed an imaginative gift which enabled them to foresee and herald the perfected human family as the counterpart of God's personal rectitude and loving kindness. What they really did was to subject this world to judgment by the world to come, and that judgment abides.<sup>32</sup>

Take as a concrete example the rhapsody of Isaiah against the mighty empire of Babylon, in which we can almost hear the thundering advance of the enemy assailing that proud self-contained and corrupting Power:

"How art thou fallen from heaven  
 Daystar, son of the dawn,  
 (How) art thou hewn down to earth,  
 Hurtler at nations.  
 And thou, thou didst say in thine heart,  
 'The heavens will I scale,  
 Far up to the stars of God  
 Light high my throne,  
 And sit on the mount of assembly,  
 Far back of the north,  
 I will climb on the heights of (the) cloud  
 I will match the Most High!'  
 Ah! to Sheol thou art hurled  
 Far back of the pit."<sup>33</sup>

Isaiah's only competitor in poignant delineation is the prophet of the exile. Here is a passage in Prin-

<sup>32</sup> Cf. W. Robertson Smith: *The Prophets of Israel*; E. A. Edghill: *The Evidential Value of Prophecy*; T. H. Robinson: *Prophecy and The Prophets*; J. M. Powis Smith: *The Prophets and their Times*.

<sup>33</sup> George Adam Smith: *The Book of Isaiah*, Vol. I, p. 414.



cial Sir George Adam Smith's translation which contains an announcement of the advent of redemption with the stateliness and solemnity reminiscent of a Beethoven march:

"Who is this coming from Edom,  
Raw-red his garment from Bossrah!  
This sweeping on in his raiment,  
Swaying in the wealth of his strength?

I that do speak in righteousness,  
Mighty to save!

Wherefore is red on thy raiment,  
And thy garments like to a wine-treader's?

A trough I have trodden alone,  
Of the peoples no man was with me.  
So I trod them down in my wrath,  
And trampled them down in my fury;  
Their life-blood sprinkled my garments,  
And all my raiment I stained.  
For the day of revenge in my heart,  
And the year of my redeemed has come.  
And I looked, and no helper;  
I gazed and none to uphold!  
So my righteousness won me salvation,  
And my fury, it hath upheld me.  
So I stamp on the peoples in my wrath,  
And make them drunk with my fury,  
And bring down to earth their life-blood." <sup>34</sup>

Consider the wealth of incident and emotion implied by words like these. Add to such notable outbursts the Bible's concepts of Deity, of man and of his moral freedom, and its biographies and his-

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, Vol. II, p. 443 f.

tories with their keen analyses of character. Think of the gifts of expression employed in the service of religious imagination that could paint antitheses and contrasts which remain constantly true. Recall the lyrics and odes already quoted and many more that might be mentioned. Do you wonder that Shelley and even Milton refrained from dramatizing Job because they found the poem altogether beyond their powers? Fables like those of Jotham and Jehoshaphat, the vision of Micaiah so redolent of mythical fancy, the stories related of Samson which preserve the folklore of many generations, the humanity and breadth of fiction in the book of Jonah, alike prepared the way for the parables that Jesus told with such peerless maturity of art.<sup>35</sup>

The minister of God must bring to Holy Scripture an informed mind and a disciplined imagination, or he will remind his audiences of the mob of astrologers and soothsayers who were gathered before the writing on the wall in Babylon, but were unable to interpret it. We have good reason to rejoice in the men in whom is an excellent spirit; to whom has been given light, wisdom and understanding; who can accurately read the "Mene, Mene, Tekel, Upharsin" of the Bible's creative minds, and say with confidence: "this is the interpretation of the thing." Daniels who thus come to the deciphering of divine realities have always been a godsend, and never more than now. Those realities do not resemble the melted gold, minted and ready for circulation. Like the precious metal

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<sup>35</sup> Judges, ix 8 ff.; II Kings, xiv. 9; I Kings, xxii. 19 ff. It should be mentioned that the Old Testament contains hardly any "pure" mythology such as abounds in Babylonian, Greek and Roman literature.

in the quarry they lie in their native veins of history and fiction awaiting the preacher's search. He must mine, mint and present them. And they must bear the stamp of his own imagination. The stiffly rigid mind deems it impossible to separate the gold from the dross or to distinguish between poetry and prose, figurative speech and prosaic. "I find," said an authority on art and on spiritual things, "imagination to be a great help to religion. The Bible encourages me in this more than any book in the world; and often, when the accustomed *forms* of truth grow less attractive, or when the pressure of moral responsibility becomes intense, the bright wand of the ideal transfigures in endless directions truth on truth. And so a strong refreshment comes to the soul by that very agency which in past years I have often led to regard as an enemy." <sup>36</sup>

It is astonishing, yet true, that great areas of the Bible still remain in large measure virgin soil, not only for laymen, but also for far too many of the clergy. They slavishly follow the beaten track of dogma, and fight shy of the more challenging passages of the Book. The idea that fiction plays a predominant part in its divine instruction is not congenial to some Christians whose love of system is at once their strength and weakness. Yet it is not only as revelation but as a literary achievement that Holy Scripture maintains its monarchical sway over all other literature. Its excellencies partake of both the homely and the sublime. The proud scholar, the precise stylist, the eloquent orator, the ponderous proof weaver, the skilled dialectician are forced to draw upon its unequalled imageries and

<sup>36</sup> *Letters of James Smetham*, p. 111 f.

descriptions. These images should be implicit in your thinking, for they contain the essence of all theology. This is the more necessary because doctrinal agreements and disagreements are primarily neither logical nor doctrinal, but imaginative. The Deity you visualize for yourself supplies the main-spring of all your preaching. Let perception as the consciousness of specific objects, conception which formulates the ideas that explain those objects, reasoning which yields the values of the judgment process, and memory that recalls experiences of every sort, alike make use of the image making power. Then place the results at the disposal of your hearers and you will not labor in vain nor spend your strength for naught. Sir Thomas Browne speaks of "ingression into the Divine Shadow," a phrase which shows him to be one with those who have sent up to God the music of the lover and the bard. Such was Wordsworth at Tintern Abbey or when he watched the daffodils, and Tennyson who had his ecstatic trances with their sense of illimitableness and liberty. But they experienced nothing spiritually fundamental which is impossible to the humblest believer who visualizes Jesus as the Christ of the Father and the Saviour of the world.

## CHAPTER VI

### THE CHRIST OF ROMANCE

The Orient differs from the Occident in the range and power of imagination—Various terms that describe Oriental forms of religious conception—Why Jesus adopted parabolic discourse and its significance—His creative poetic imagination—The truths of the Kingdom of God expressed by Jesus—Classification of the parables—Allegorical exegesis has wrested meanings foreign to the mind of the Master—The preacher's opportunity for a more comprehensive interpretation of the Eternal Gospel.

Religious education is a means, not an end, especially with the young who respond to its emotional and directive power more readily than to its actual acquirements of knowledge. Our pressing question is how religious education is related to the imagination, and the Church has few more arduous tasks than to answer it satisfactorily. Certainly the boundaries of religious imagism in theological statement, preaching, artistic symbolism and architecture will have to be enlarged so as to include the whole of life. Once this is done or even attempted, multitudes of disaffected, indifferent or ignorant people may be induced to seek communion with the sacred mysteries of faith. Whenever the Church puts a ban on either the gains of modern science or



the notable contributions of art, she exposes her mission to the perils of fanaticism or to a barren repulsive ugliness. Her worship inevitably is degraded when either the intellect or the emotions are denied their legitimate functions. But when religious emotionalism is stimulated by the holiness of beauty and regulated by intelligence, human adoration of the Divine takes its rightful place as one of the most efficient means to attain a high and lasting civilization.

The historical, institutional and doctrinal forms of Christianity corroborate these assertions. They rise or fall in value according to their relation with the image making power. A visioned imagination like that of St. Augustine, St. Thomas Aquinas or John Calvin determines Christianity's progress for centuries. The growth of the Church from the infant assembly in Jerusalem to her present dimensions is epitomized in her mystics, saints and dreamers: the discerning spirits who visualized her future. Protestantism cannot afford any longer to neglect the issue before it. Its enlightened leaders have at last taken some hesitant steps to heal the breach between sixteenth century dogma and present day learning. The ethic of the New Testament is now being tentatively applied to industrial, social and international problems. But the Reformed Churches have scarcely yet realized how deep is the cleft between their worship and the richly stored realm of æsthetics.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Von Ogden Vogt: *Art and Religion*, p. 18 ff.; Percy Dearmer: *The Art of Public Worship*, p. 20 ff.; *Education for Christian Service*, by Members of the Faculty of the Divinity School of Yale University, p. 165 ff., 209 ff.; Oscar L. Joseph: *The Dynamic Ministry*, p. 137 ff.; Willard L. Sperry: *Reality in Worship*, p. 159 ff.

The Western mind is prone to ignore the definite fact that Christianity originated in the imagination of the East. Indeed the intellectual cleric or layman is usually suspicious of the Oriental mind, which is often regarded as an unfathomable sea of vain suppositions and vagrant fancies. Because its psychology is baffling, no serious attempt is made by the majority of us to understand its motions. The essential difference is that Eastern peoples endeavor to subdue their souls, while Western races are interested in subduing their environment. Heart and mind go together in the Orient in its love of the abstract and the occult and in meditation upon inscrutable spiritual phenomena.<sup>2</sup> In sharp contrast the Occident is concrete, practical and specific. The former type makes religion the source of an all-embracing communism; the latter, the mainstay of individualism and independence in everything. Brought into juxtaposition, as both types were in Christianity's origin and progress, the chief consideration before us is their consequent tendency. What matters most is not how fast or how slowly things move, but the direction in which they are traveling. The Protestant minister who rejects imagism and tries to express in balanced restraint and symmetry the truths of the prophets of the Old Testament and the Gospel of the New Testament is apt to become vapid, tame and stereotyped. He practices conciseness of statement and logical arrangement and disregards the unimpeded flights of the dreamer's soul. He is attracted by didactic argument rather than the elements of surprise and awe. He thinks more of the authority than of the

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<sup>2</sup> Cf. Rabindranath Tagore: *Creative Unity*, p. 43 ff.

charm of tradition and has little appreciation for the insights of the creative mind or the intuitions of the imagination.

Yet what he deprecates or avoids was the very medium employed by our Lord. He was the daring romancer who gave fiction great prominence in His mission as the divine Teacher and Guide of the race. Before He became the Christ of men's widespread experience and absorbing devotion, He was the Jesus of a thrilling adventure in human life itself. The eternal quality of His thoughts and words was made clear in the light of His vision, "with an eye made quiet by the power of harmony, and the deep power of joy." Knowing the very life of God and man, He committed His knowledge to "the sad incompetence of human speech." His authority rested not upon an inherited system, but upon the illuminating power of His imagisms. By these He delivered His followers from the crushing weight of religious externalism and translated them into a spiritual realm of infinite freedom and strength. His pictorial genius revealed His unique oneness with the Father and His inerrant comprehension of human souls. Such were the animating principles of our Lord's Evangel, originating in His profound intimacies with the world to come and having beneficial reactions upon that which now is. Why then should we marvel that He painted His Gospel's far-reaching verities in the warm glowing colors of our daily existence? All life's mysteries must be thus palpably presented, or they will remain bewilderingly ineffective for the immense majority of men and women.

Truths He embodied in familiar tales were lit by the lambent flame burning within Him. His

very breath was woven into speech which prompted deeds of service and sacrifice and consolidated into virtuous characters whose examples are their apologetic. The simplicity of His parabolic method saved it from the numerous snares besetting speculation and circulated His teachings in a universal dress. The parables themselves appeal to all readers by the charm and winsomeness of their fictional beauty. They ease the conscience by cleansing the heart, and quiet its fears by sealing the whole man as his Maker's property. Of course symbolical interpretations of Christianity have ascertainable boundaries which our Lord Himself observed, but His practice confirms this method as legitimate in principle and fruitful for religious instruction. It was also in accord with the widespread custom of His era. From the Yang-tse-Kiang and the Ganges to the Jordan, Oriental peoples think and debate in gorgeous images and picturesque similitudes. They delight in narratives keeping well within the limits of human experience that do not profess historical actuality in events or in details, but are conceived by the imagination for the express purpose of enforcing moral or spiritual truths. Their mental processes are analogical and often so oscillate between thought and imagery that the intellectual merges into the imaginative and facts are confused with fiction. The *Jataka* or Birth stories of Buddhism, for instance, are really apologues in which inanimate things and animals behave as human beings. Gautama also used the parable to convey spiritual guidance for human action, confident that right-minded men would readily enough catch its meaning. Confucius likewise employed it to promote the soul's concentration upon its proper ob-

jectives undisturbed by the diversions of the will. The intuitive love of harmony which cannot conceive of anything separated from its proper setting prompts the Oriental to identify the self with the visible and the invisible, often to the fatal neglect of the individual. In comparison with the vast scheme of the universe he conceives himself infinitesimal in importance and so becomes fatalistic in temper. The strength of Christian democracy springs from that sense of personal distinction which is the creed of Western nations. For want of it Japan has produced no great systems of philosophy or religion. Her eagerness to acquire it is recent and it accounts for the Japanese imitation of democratized States.<sup>3</sup> But it was the Semitic people who produced earth's purest religions, and to these we turn to inquire about their chief method of propaganda.

The Old Testament word *mashal* is a generic term applied to proverbs, riddles, oracles, poetical compositions and parables, all of which imply the idea of comparison. Oral communications were requisite for their transmission, and concrete word pictures illustrated and drove home their lessons. The *similitude* explained a subtler conception by means of a more apparent one, and thus made what was unfamiliar convincing. The *allegory* reversed the process and drew meanings from the familiar of which the uninitiated had no inkling. The *fable* moved in the realm of fantasy, metamorphosing irrational into rational creatures and attributing to beasts and the inanimate human qualities and intelligence. Nature was thus drawn upon in Isaiah's

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<sup>3</sup> Cf. Tasuku Harada: *The Faith of Japan*.



"Song of the Vineyard;" he also adopted parabolic action when he paraded the streets of Jerusalem half clad and barefooted to shame the inexpedient peace made by Judah with Egypt.<sup>4</sup> *Proverbs* were the pithy sententious coinage in the vernacular, minted by the group mind and handed down from generation to generation. In the first book of Samuel we read: "Out of the wicked cometh forth wickedness," and in the Gospel of St. Luke: "Physician, heal thyself."<sup>5</sup> *Metaphors* were figures of speech which applied a word or phrase denoting one object or idea to another to suggest a likeness between them. Their most striking use in Holy Writ is that word of our Lord: "Take my yoke upon you and learn of me."<sup>6</sup> These and other kindred forms of speech were prevalent throughout the East, and nowhere more so than in the Rabbinical Literature of the Talmud.<sup>7</sup> They still flourish undiminished in scope and vividness, as a single quotation from Sadhu Sundar Singh, the Hindu Christian saint and mystic must suffice to show: "On the mountains torrents flow right along, cutting their own courses, but on the plains canals have to be dug out painfully by men so that the water might flow. So among those who live on the heights with God, the Holy Spirit makes its way through of its own accord, whereas those who de-

<sup>4</sup> Isaiah v. 1 ff.; xx. 2 ff.

<sup>5</sup> I Samuel xxiv. 13; St. Luke iv. 23.

<sup>6</sup> St. Matthew xi. 29.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Lawrence E. Browne: *The Parables of the Gospels*, p. 26 ff.; Article, "Parable" by W. J. Moulton, *A Dictionary of Christ and the Gospels*, edited by James Hastings, Vol. II, p. 312 ff.; Maurice H. Farbridge: *Studies in Biblical and Semitic Symbolism*, p. 3 ff.

vote little time to prayer and communion with God have to organize painfully.”<sup>8</sup> Could the devotional states of the soul be set forth more impressively than in this analogical way? And may it not be a fitting overture to our consideration of the Parables of Jesus?

Enough has been said to enable us to glimpse the endless hinterlands of imagination stretching into the recesses of the far past which awaited His divine use of the image making gift. What was outworn, unserviceable or malignant passed away, and the possibilities of a regenerated world dawned upon the grateful vision of His disciples. Humanly speaking, no other course seemed open to Jesus except that of parabolic instruction. Its methods were long wedded to the Semitic intellect, as were those of philosophic enquiry to the Grecian, and of legal jurisprudence to the Roman. By its means He transformed the heavens and the earth, and taught disconsolate and destitute people, robbed of their true consciousness of God, that, in Goethe’s words:

“As at my feet, the gaze entrancing,  
Rests rocky deep on deep profound,  
As flow a thousand streamlets glancing  
Unto the foam-flood’s shuddering bound,  
As, with a mighty impulse sailing,  
The tree shoots upward straight and tall,  
E’en so Almighty Love, unfailing,  
Doth fashion all and cherish all.”<sup>9</sup>

Yet our Lord did not adopt the parable in His earlier ministry. John the Baptist had roused the

<sup>8</sup> B. H. Streeter and A. J. Appasamy: *The Message of Sadhu Sundar Singh*, p. 14.

<sup>9</sup> Goethe: *Faust* (Everyman’s Library), Part II, p. 334.

conscience of a race aware of its proud past but humiliated by its present enforced submission to the imperial rule of Rome. The Jews were more disposed to dispute about the steep and difficult path of Israel's destiny than to tread it. John was beheaded for his temerity in openly rebuking Herod and his revengeful paramour for their adulterous connection. It was his fiery exhortations to repentance that gave Jesus the cue for His opening message which was also steeped in the ethic and piety of the Old Testament prophets and psalmists. He stressed with stern accents, as in the Sermon on the Mount, the prior claims of justice and truth over ritual and sacrifice. Devotion and purity, earnestness and reality characterized the first cycle of His preaching, and drew to it the multitudes who gathered in the synagogues or the open air. For a time decorum repressed and policy concealed the rising animosity of the Temple officials. As the inflexible guardians of tradition, their blunted moral susceptibilities were harmonized with their strong propensities for persecution. The popularity of the Galilean peasant, as they deemed him, also alarmed them. His fearlessness and candor in attacking venerable prerogatives sincerely identified by them with the national welfare finally decided His fate. "It is expedient for you," said the High Priest to his colleagues, "that one man should die for the people, and that the whole nation perish not."<sup>10</sup>

Meanwhile the crowds which had flocked to His ministry fell away from Him rather than meet His inexorable demand for a righteousness exceeding

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<sup>10</sup> St. John xi. 50.

that of the Scribes and Pharisees. The deadly fury of these official sects and the shallowness of the populace, their reluctance to think, unwillingness to believe, refusal to follow "the Living Way" effected startling changes in the Teaching of the Master. For Him the clouds dispersed, leaving an open heaven for radiant hopes and deepened interests such as His imagination alone could generate in that environment of suspicion and anger. Hereafter He dwelt in the friendly domain of the invisible and there found assurances of support which his enemies could not annul. The transition violated no vital meanings of Old Testament Scripture. He had not come to destroy but to fulfil the inspired counsels, exhortations and remonstrances of Israel's legislators, psalmists and prophets. Like them He was immune to the honors and rewards of earth. From the day of His baptism in the wilderness His engrossing purpose was to bring to a burning focus the Gospel of His Incarnation. But this could not be done, nor the foundation of His kingdom well and truly laid until he had secured an assent to His Message. That was to be found, not in the fickle people amenable for the moment only to His hortatory discourse, but in the faithful and reflective few who eagerly heard and pondered His parables. So He addressed them in paradoxical presentations of divine things which compelled those who listened to think for themselves, and laid the burden of their choice upon that kind of thinking.

## II

Note here certain main characteristics that distinguish our Lord's parables from all kindred

works of fiction. He universalized this current mode of teaching by concentrating its dispersed rays of light upon mysteries beyond the reach of ordinary language. His luminous imagination allied the realm of Nature with His divine revelation. No other Scriptural parable, such as Nathan's touching story of the lost ewe lamb, or the anecdote of the besieged city in Ecclesiastes, or Isaiah's apologue of the fruitful vineyard, is comparable to the parabolic utterances of Jesus for the dramatic realization of life in man and in his environment.<sup>11</sup> His manifestation of the heavenly through the earthly was perfectly adapted to the twofold being of humanity as body and spirit, and readily predisposed obedient and willing hearts to receive these symbolic teachings which showed the sacramental harmony between the seen and unseen worlds. His concrete and tangible imageries were peculiarly suitable to attract and retain the attention of the unlettered hearers who have always constituted the majority of mankind. The parable, as St. Jerome has said, was the favorite vehicle for conveying moral truth throughout the East. In the West also this particular endowment of imaginative wealth has given its possessors a place among those who bring honor and glory into the City of God. So *Pilgrim's Progress* has advanced the religion of Jesus far more than many weighty tomes of divinity have done, and *Paradise Lost* has exerted an influence upon the current beliefs of Protestantism which its formal and erudite theological treatises never have had.

Taken as a whole the parables of Jesus are

<sup>11</sup> II Samuel xii. 1 ff.; Eccles. ix. 13 ff.; Isaiah v. 1 ff.



models of the literary art. They permit no byplay or empty adornment. Their oblique appeals exhibit the wisdom and affection, the truth and honor, the independence and integrity of the Supreme Teacher. Common objects like a passing cloud or a wayside flower sufficed to evoke from Him subliminal depths of divine beauty and truth which no received creed has since expressed. What He had been told by His blessed Mother during the preparatory years at Nazareth, the sights and scenes He had witnessed in the hill country of Galilee, the habits and pursuits of its people reappear in new and fuller forms in the parables. But stronger and more elevated forces vibrate in them than either material phenomena or intellectual gifts can explain. At their height they tell us of speechless things which enlighten the mind to move the heart. Historical and didactic narratives are eclipsed by these parabolic outpourings of imagination. Their emphasis upon individual action, such as their insistence that each soul shall enter the strait gateway to God, is balanced by an equal emphasis upon the oneness of the fraternity thus admitted; a oneness more vital and compact than that known to any other organization. Their delineations of this Commonwealth of faith and love, a Superstate oblivious to political and racial separatisms, were struck off in a rapid series of images which do not lend themselves to analysis. Their exhaustless resources of rebuke and consolation, of counsel and guidance, have been extolled by all believers during the past twenty centuries. Such treasures could not be squandered upon the careless and the prejudiced. It was the urgency of His mission, not contempt for the wilful depravity of

those who refused to heed Him, which prevented our Lord from giving that which was holy to the dogs and casting His pearls before swine.<sup>12</sup> Their tragedy was that they heeded not the day of their visitation but deliberately rejected its light for the darkness of prejudice and of an incurable nationalistic pride. He was also under constraint to conserve divine truth for an interminable period ahead, unburdened by endless objections and futile controversies. The chronic tendency of the Jew to religious disputation made this conservation a difficult undertaking. Yet what Jesus revealed in parables was plain enough to hearers who desired truth in the inward parts, and in the hidden parts He made them to know its wisdom. On the other hand, it was remote from the apprehension of men who were as avid for debate upon its creedal or intellectual aspects as they were indifferent to its ethical and religious applications. His portrait of these zealots as straining out the gnat while they gulped down the camel gave them a historic if sinister place in imagination's picture gallery.<sup>13</sup>

Mere draperies, trifling points, incidentals magnified beyond recognition, the obstinate confusion of principles with formalistic rituals or of things diametrically opposed and the casuistries that had corrupted the ecclesiastical groups of His time were alike obnoxious to Christ. Ignoring these deviations from reason and from righteousness, He followed a straight path and gave forth the living word, rich with the spiritual spoils of a great past and one transfigured and made available by Him

<sup>12</sup> St. Matthew vii. 6.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, xxiii. 24.

for all after days. He was intent on rectifying and regulating the human will in behalf of His Father's purposes. For this cause He dealt broadly with the general culture of the Hebrews, and interwove their laws, beliefs, literature and customs into His parabolic presentations of religion. Their clarity, naturalness, beauty and pictorial setting insured their permanence. Yet He did not minimize their realistic in favor of their impressionistic features, nor allow their emotional elements to escape His control. The theoretical blended with the practical in His creative imagination, which was nourished by His marvelous insight, constant observation and range of experience. A hallowed idealism mellowed His thoughts. His perspectives of life were inerrant and spacious, including both worlds and separating actual from fictitious values. Moreover He was a superb artist in language, never wanting in the inevitable word or the unforgettable phrase. His concrete pointed sentences seemed to photograph situations and events, or, as with an X-Ray, to reveal the buried thoughts and desires of His hearers. His figurative instruction was sometimes supplemented by non-figurative comments which elucidated their meaning. Yet He would not force His teaching upon jaundiced hearers who condemned it. It could only be seized by diligent attention and assimilated by honest and earnest reflection.

There were intervals in His ministry when its primary aim was not to bring home the subject at issue to the understanding of His hearers. On the contrary, its inwardness was screened from them by a veil of symbolical speech which prevented its immediate apprehension and left it to their devout

after-reflection. "Therefore," said He, "speak I to them in parables; because seeing they see not, and hearing they hear not, neither do they understand."<sup>14</sup> Here, as elsewhere, the nascent development of Christian doctrine which some deplore is at least suggested. What our Lord said is therefore not to be construed literally nor confined to the localities of its utterance. Sir Francis Bacon asserted that a parable tends to veil the truth and tends to illustrate the truth. George Meredith confessed that he made some of his passages obscure because he did not wish directly to declare the disenrobed verities. In higher senses than those of the Elizabethan philosopher or the Victorian novelist our Lord conditioned the interpretation of His teaching. It demanded an affinity of soul between Him and those who heard it. It became a progressive test of their intellectual capacity as determined by their moral and spiritual fitness. Those who met the test received the truth, and more truth awaited their researches.<sup>15</sup> Its accruing benefits were graded according to their opportunities and the use they made of them. The inner circle of disciples was surely slow of heart to believe. The outer circle did not even perceive that religious realities are not simply seed scattered to fertilize of itself. They are graftings to be inserted in the very tissues of human hearts with an incision that requires expert spiritual surgery, operating in the patience of hope and the labor of love. Our Lord's words contain spirit and life which convey them to the end of the ages. They give sanctuary to the

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, xiii. 13.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, xiii. 11 ff.

profounder mysteries of faith that excite the adoration of the spiritual mind. He planted the seed of His completest divine consciousness in human soil, and left it to an unlimited reproduction that should yet fill the world. "The parables of Christ," wrote Dr. Swete, "possess a character which is peculiar to themselves. Myths, fables, allegories are common in literature ancient and modern; but there is no other collection of 'parables' that can be placed in comparison with those which we find in the Gospels. Their extraordinary beauty is recognized by all; the intimate knowledge which they show of Nature and of man is not less unique than their beauty. Yet it is not either their literary beauty or their exact correspondence with the facts of life which gives to the parables their supreme interest. That interest lies in the knowledge that they constitute a very considerable part of the recorded teaching of our Lord. Both the method of teaching which they illustrate, and the actual instruction of which they are the vehicle, are heirlooms which cannot be prized too much, especially by those who are themselves to be teachers of Christian truth." <sup>16</sup>

Too few commentators have done justice to His unsparing but striking use of irony, sarcasm and humor. An incredibly pedantic attitude has frequently overlooked His humanness, His rare social qualities, His readiness of repartee, and the aptness of His spontaneous replies to questions intended to embarrass or to shame Him. How nakedly open the psychology of His audience was to His searching gaze is set forth in the parable of the soils, oth-

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<sup>16</sup> Henry Barclay Swete: *The Parables of the Kingdom*, p. 2.



erwise known as that of the sower. He plumbed the depths and visioned the heights of the human soul in language of startling thrust and clearness. The vein of imaginative excess which runs through certain phases of His teaching only adds to its impressiveness. He spoke, not as a maker of theologies nor as a formulator of doctrines, but as God's laureate. His thought was lucid yet designedly unsystematic. He did not address Himself to the reason so much as to the heart. The antitheses of Hebrew poetry, and not the rhythmic flow of Latin and Greek verse, were His chosen method. At times His imagisms ascend to a climax of realistic vividness in the region of the weird and ghastly. Some parabolic passages that describe the close of the present dispensation are "brilliantly poetic flame pictures which gather up into themselves much of the wild beauty and wonder of the apocalyptic imagination then so universal." Other passages have a vagueness of allusion that transcends "all limits and definitions, which is, as it were, the poetic obverse of the clear edge."<sup>17</sup>

The grandeur of His stormier moods has been glossed over by writers who distrust the illimitable sweep and tumult of a wholly inspired mind. Yet He always steers clear of allegory's fatal descent into artificial or abnormal fancifulness. His revelatory statements are translucent, fresh, vigorous, healthy in tone, bringing the morning of God to mankind. The Rabbinical teachers pile up their lengthy expositions of legend or of law upon a text, in keeping with the rigid requirements of overwrought and cumbersome exegesis. In contrast

<sup>17</sup> John Kelman: Article "Poet," *A Dictionary of Christ and the Gospels*, edited by James Hastings, Vol. II, p. 372 ff.

to them Jesus based His parables upon life's actual experiences imaginatively assimilated and reëmbodied with brevity, aptness and comprehension. They are free from tiresome prolixities, superfluous asides and tantalizing irrelevance, filled with the spacious tides of absolute knowledge and deliberate conviction. Light and shade alternate in their outlook as He foresees the varied fortunes and the final ending of the mighty duel between good and evil. His hyperboles enlarged the boundaries of possibility and even then His principles could scarcely find sufficient room to display their illimitable moral significance. He was all inclusive in His range. For Him the earth was God's footstool and all its inhabitants were His children. His idealizations depended upon His conception of the Everlasting Father whose grace and mercy, forbearance and judgment, overflowed in the sayings of His Son. He foresaw a universe compact of unadulterated spirituality, continuous with man's present life, adjustable to his diversified conditions and hospitable to all his aspirations from the barest beginnings of primevalism to the infinite expansions of the æons to come. This universe was to be coextensive with the reign of God in righteousness and plenteously endowed by the gifts of His Evangel in Christ Himself. Every soul had a right to its beneficence, and no prodigal could return to its allegiance without the jubilation of the angels. Such evaluations of the universe and of man were alien to the mind of contemporary Israel. But they emitted a light that has not failed for the sinful and the contrite, when made aware of the consequences of their self-betrayal; and they

still rally believers to a courageous renewal of their efforts to realize the ideals of their Lord.

Always and everywhere He was the teacher and the preacher, illustrating and applying the holiest principles of religion in ways that exhibited both a sure knowledge of human life and a sublime consciousness of God. These were His without measure and in their display lies His supremacy. No infirmity of intellect nor taint of moral evil put its veto on His resolution to descry the mystic earth and heaven within Himself. The unspeakable treasure He found there He willed that all believers should eventually own and enjoy. Every obstacle to this miraculous change lost its menace in His conception of love's redemptive omnipotence. Though the language of imagination has to leave much to be supplied by the responding imagination, no candid reader of the New Testament can seriously question that Christ's culminating purpose in the parables, as in His entire ministry, was to establish forever among men the Kingdom of love, truth, beauty and goodness.

### III

This proposed Kingdom centered upon the Fatherhood of God. It was therefore incumbent upon Jesus to domicile in His own and after ages that Deity which had been removed to a frigid and almost incommunicable distance by the orthodox tenets of His time. This He did by means of those parables which depict God as the All Father, dwelling close to His children in an eternal relation of love and seeking the response of love from them.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>18</sup> Cf. The Parables of "The Lost Sheep," "The Lost Coin," and "The Lost Son" (St. Luke xv. 3 ff.)

Although Christ's references to the Father are always reverent and submissive, they are also made in the accents of perfect affection and breathe that complete understanding which such affection alone creates. It was His meat and drink to do the Father's will.<sup>19</sup>

The parables furthermore bear witness to Jesus as at once God's Poem and Poet: the designed Image of the otherwise unknown Deity. If His character is studied in history, the parables will prove to be the best credentials of his claims as the Teacher sent from above. They entirely differentiate Him from all other romancers who abounded in the Orient, whose characters are as blank as Modred's shield. In considering the imaginative geniuses of later ages, one scarcely recognizes the Shakespeare of *Hamlet* and *King Lear* in the frequenter of London's taverns or the shrewd speculator in real estate at Stratford-on-Avon. We are not readily reconciled to have the Spenser who wrote the *Faerie Queene* brought down to the mean level of the mercenary secretary of Lord Deputies of Ireland. The Byron on the field of Waterloo in *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* is at a far remove from the jaded voluptuary of Venice. It is difficult to understand that the same Keats could have penned his beautiful sonnets and those pitiable letters to Fanny Brawne. Undoubtedly Swinburne had command of marvelous resources of artistic expression, but how seldom are they used to convey correspondingly upraising thoughts! As any form of rhetoric, however lovely, is no more than a resounding shell in itself, so ideas, however

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<sup>19</sup> St. John iv. 34, v. 19 ff., vi. 37 ff.

weighty, rely upon the moral worth of the thinkers who circulate them for a large measure of their influence. The parabolic teachings of Jesus are exalted by the contrast between Him and the instructors and authors of eras preceding or following His own. The parables are different because they reflect the majestic loneliness and unique significance of His divine personality. They are superior because they emanate from the spiritual freedom, harmony and holiness in which that personality moved. If they take the present world as their stage of action and the world to come for their fulfillment, it is because He was their Hero and they were His expression. Those who rightly interpret them must first know Him in whom there was neither blot nor flaw nor discrepancy; before whose inward purity the brightest stars are impure; in whom all seeking spirits find the Lord of their life.

The mystery of the Kingdom which the parables also contain demands the sympathetic response of faith for its elucidation. In nature it is the seed cast in fertile soil which yields a rich harvest.<sup>20</sup> In preciousness it resembles the hid treasure and the pearl of great price.<sup>21</sup> The tares subtly sown in the wheat illustrate its present mixed constituencies and their separation at a coming and final reckoning.<sup>22</sup> Its influence permeates through society as the leaven spreads in the dough.<sup>23</sup> Its gradual accretions are likened to those of the maturing corn.<sup>24</sup> Its history is similar to that of the mustard

<sup>20</sup> St. Matthew xiii. 8.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, xiii. 44 ff.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, xiii. 24 ff.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, xiii. 33.

<sup>24</sup> St. Mark iv. 26.



seed, so minute in size yet capable of tremendous expansion.<sup>25</sup> Its judgment registers the fixity in human destiny as shown by the choice of the fish brought in by the drag net.<sup>26</sup> Its manifestations are neither spectacular nor apocalyptic, but slow and secret in their processes, undetected except by the waiting and vigilant spirit.<sup>27</sup> The attitude of the people toward the Kingdom and what it had to offer was set forth in a series of memorable stories. The parable of "The Great Feast" revealed the indifference of the majority and their readiness to frame excuses.<sup>28</sup> The impulsive and the considerate are alike depicted in "The Two Sons."<sup>29</sup> The unfaithful are exposed in the parable of the servants who betrayed their master's interests.<sup>30</sup> The genuinely generous and religious receive immortal portraiture in the exquisite story of "The Good Samaritan."<sup>31</sup> The presumptuous formalist and the earnest penitent are shown how they look to others in "The Pharisee and the Publican."<sup>32</sup> The thoughtful and the careless receive their due in "The Ten Virgins."<sup>33</sup> The need for persistency in prayer is enforced by the coming of the friend at midnight, and by the importunate widow before the unjust judge.<sup>34</sup> The untold value of the human soul is made clear in "The Lost Coin," "The Lost Sheep" and "The Lost Son."<sup>35</sup> Again, in these parables Jesus defends His hospitality toward the sinful and the outcast. The folly of selfishness and indulgence is pilloried in "Dives

<sup>25</sup> St. Luke xiii. 18 ff.

<sup>26</sup> St. Matthew xiii. 47 ff.

<sup>27</sup> St. Luke xii. 35 ff.; xvii. 20 ff.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, xiv. 15 ff.

<sup>29</sup> St. Matthew xxi. 28 ff.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, xxi. 33 ff.

<sup>31</sup> St. Luke x. 25 ff.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, xviii. 9 ff.

<sup>33</sup> St. Matthew xxv. 1 ff.

<sup>34</sup> St. Luke xi. 5 ff.; xviii. 1 ff.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, xv. 3 ff.

and Lazarus.”<sup>36</sup> The fatuity of wealth worship is scathingly criticized in “The Rich Fool.”<sup>37</sup>

Dr. A. B. Bruce finds thirty-three parables and eight parable germs, and classifies them as theoretic or didactic parables, evangelic parables and prophetic or judicial parables, dealing respectively with Jesus as Master, Evangelist and Prophet, who revealed deep, unfamiliar and often unwelcome truths.<sup>38</sup> A Jülicher reckons fifty-three, which he distributes into twenty-eight similitudes, twenty-one parables proper, and four example stories.<sup>39</sup> G. Stanley Hall separates them into twenty-eight comparison parables, twenty-one true parables and four illustrative narratives.<sup>40</sup> However systematized or studied for their literary form or specific teaching, it is evident that Jesus showed supreme wisdom in adopting this imaginative method for His oral teaching. His incomparable skill in weaving life's common facts and occurrences into such edifying stories is patent to the casual reader. But while all who heard them were interested, only the few penetrated their inner meanings. Their consummate word pictures, dexterously turning daily customs and traditional beliefs to new uses, were intended to pierce the springs of thought in His listeners and induce them to open the shell of these stories, that they might appropriate and practice their core of spiritual truth. They fascinated all, but illumined few. How different their pellucid simplicity from the involved dialectic of St. Paul,

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, xvi. 19 ff.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, xii. 16 ff.

<sup>38</sup> *The Parabolic Teaching of Jesus*, p. 8 f.

<sup>39</sup> Edward E. Nourse: Article, “Parable,” *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics*, edited by James Hastings, Vol. IX, p. 630.

<sup>40</sup> *Jesus Christ in the Light of Psychology*, Vol. II, p. 517 ff.

whose abstract reasonings and technicalities sometimes confuse even the close student!<sup>41</sup> The founder of Western Christianity would have been the first to admit this contrast and to exult in the superiority of his Lord. None the less are we as preachers admonished by our Lord's example that spoken discourse, especially in the Churches which largely depend upon it, should aim at simplicity, concreteness and vividness of style. Our age is overburdened with a plethora of ephemeral literature and betrayed by speed without direction. Its futility in spiritual research halts its progress everywhere. The pioneers of God's Kingdom are either too few or too beset by meaningless details. Yet it is an age which will respond to any ministry, which after the imaginative manner of the Master interprets its sensations, desires and thoughts for its spiritual benefit.

It is quite reasonable that classic models should be preferred in architecture, sculpture and kindred pursuits. But preaching should not be cast in any stereotyped mold. It is essentially romantic and poetical, and only as it dares to be such does it become influential and persuasive. Simple realism in the things of the spirit, akin to that of the Greek thinkers and orators, is a key to pulpit power. The saying of Jesus, "Except ye turn, and become as little children, ye shall in no wise enter the kingdom of heaven," has profound significance for those who are supposed to point to the kingdom and lead the way.<sup>42</sup> There was solid truth in the address of James Russell Lowell at the unveiling

<sup>41</sup> Cf. T. R. Glover: *Paul of Tarsus*, pp. 8 f., 194 ff.

<sup>42</sup> St. Matthew xviii. 3.

of the Memorial to Samuel Taylor Coleridge, in which he warned Britons that if they were to regain their ancestral intellectual altitudes they would have to give up their adoration of common sense, and lay hold again of the advantages of idealism and imagination. Hard and fast materialists may decry religious romanticism, but the fact that Jesus chose the parable for Christianity's original propagation should be conclusive for His followers. To be sure, imagination is nearly always a curse when it is not a blessing. Yet by its exercise our Lord wrought a spiritual revolution which united the seen with the unseen world by new and unbreakable ties. Like Ferdinand and Miranda in *The Tempest*, His inner circle of prepared disciples changed eyes with their Master and visioned both worlds from His viewpoint. Of and for the people, sharing their lot and speaking their vernacular, He instructed them with an untaught pedagogical art which is the perpetual marvel of wisdom and effectiveness. His hearers responded according to the passions and desires throbbing in their souls and the secret hopes and fears which they were nursing. The depressed and distrustful were convinced by Jesus that the God who allowed no sparrow to fly unheeded by Him was their protector and friend.<sup>43</sup> Many learned from His lips how good the seeming worst can be and how bad the seeming best. In countless other ways, His illuminating imagisms made Him indeed the World's Light.<sup>44</sup>

<sup>43</sup> St. Luke xii. 6 f.

<sup>44</sup> St. John viii. 12.

"The simplest sights we met—

The Sower flinging seed on loam and rock;  
The darnel in the wheat; the mustard tree  
That hath its seed so little, and its boughs  
Wide-spreading; and the wandering sheep; and nets  
Shot in the wimpled waters,—drawing forth  
Great fish and small: —these, and a hundred such,  
Seen by us daily, never seen aright,  
Were pictures for Him from the page of life,  
Teaching by parable." <sup>45</sup>

#### IV

No other imaginative works have come within hailing distance of such significance either in form or substance. Writers who successfully employed similar powers of imagism have been as oases in the desert. Yet they are in a definitely lower class when compared with Jesus as to expanses of spiritual vision and realization. That individual has our commiseration who cannot kindle to the rose window in Rouen Cathedral, to a bronze by Cellini, to the carvings by Grinling Gibbons on the choir stalls of St. Paul's, London, or to the Octagonal Tower at Ely. But what shall our feelings be toward the industrious but fatuous interpreters of the parables of Jesus who force their every line and hint out of shape and meaning in the determination to make them allegorical? How they wrestled with the abrupt endings of "The Barren Fig Tree" and "The Ten Virgins"! To what straits they were put by the ethics involved in the tale of "The Unjust Steward."! <sup>46</sup> Some parables exist in diver-

<sup>45</sup> Sir Edwin Arnold: *The Light of the World*.

<sup>46</sup> St. Matthew xxi. 18 ff., xxv. 1 ff.; St. Luke xvi. 1 ff. These denouements may have been of design to provoke interest. Recall the hold of Dicken's *Edwin Drood* on the literary world because the plot is not worked out.



gent forms, others are pieced together and the artistic symmetry in still others has been lost in oral transmission. These divers reports have put commentators to infinite pains only to arrive at contradictory results, when such trifles really matter no more than a ripple on the broad Amazon. The waste of ingenuity lavished upon points of this kind by a tutorial emphasis spoils a parable completely and ruins its application. Each pictorial allusion, notwithstanding its æsthetic protest, is thrust into dialectical fetters. The central idea around which every one of these creations crystallizes is tortured in order to extract meanings and applications not originally intended.

It is natural to suppose that "The Good Samaritan" was safe in the care of Origen, perhaps the most learned and accomplished teacher of the Patristic Church.<sup>47</sup> Yet this famous Father was one of the worst offenders against that magnanimous benefactor of the helpless traveler. He seemed to be unaware that Jesus paid little regard to details, that many of His utterances were purposely left in the air, and that the Evangelists openly differ in their accounts of some parables and about the meaning of others. Thus "The Marriage Feast" for the king's son in St. Matthew becomes "The Great Supper" in St. Luke.<sup>48</sup> Undeterred by these hiatuses or alterations of Holy Writ, Origen proceeded to allegorize the whole incident of "The Good Samaritan." Jerusalem is Paradise, Jericho is the world, the traveler is Adam, the robbers are hostile demons, the Priest is the Law, the Levite is the prophets, the Samaritan is Christ, the wounds

<sup>47</sup> St. Luke x. 30 ff.

<sup>48</sup> St. Matthew xxii. 1 ff.; St. Luke xiv. 15 ff.

of the victim are disobedience, the beast is the Lord's body, the two denarii are the Father and the Son, the inn is the Church, the innkeeper is the bishop. Truly, the Good Samaritan suffered considerable outrage as the reward of his loving kindness! The purport of "The Ten Virgins" was equally explicit, but St. Chrysostom, the greatest preacher of the Eastern Church, devoted his superb homiletical gifts in deflowering it. The lamps are the graces of virginity, the oil is philanthropy, its vendors are the poor who afford opportunity for almsgiving, the cry at midnight indicates the hour of the Resurrection.

Instances of this fantastic exegesis and distortion of meaning might be indefinitely multiplied.<sup>49</sup> They refuse to die out and constitute one of the main hindrances to religious education. Genesis, Jonah, the marvelous beasts in Daniel and in The Revelation are still similarly treated in thousands of pulpits throughout Christendom. The fact that the Bible is able to survive and flourish despite these pious aberrations is sterling proof of its indestructible divinity. I mention them, not for controversial purposes, but to show how great is the debt of the best preaching of the Church to the greatly abused historical and scientific methods which have delivered it from the prison house of Biblical infallibilism, the strait jacket of literalism and the tangled skein of allegorical interpretations. We must take the Parables as our Lord gave them, without these disfigurings contributed by utterly inferior imaginations. Their author was God's Original who spoke in the actual context of His incarnate life for

<sup>49</sup> Cf. George H. Gilbert: *Interpretation of the Bible, A Short History*, p. 108 ff.; Harry Emerson Fosdick: *The Modern Use of the Bible*, p. 65 ff.

all times and all races. Every part of His message is to be read in consistency with that life which the New Testament communicates in its literary embodiment, not as a code of laws, but as a series of generative principles.

It has been pertinently said that the world often suspects ardent reformers and hot gospellers because their lives demonstrate that they are not competent judges of humanity's welfare. The criticism is barbed, but it will find no openings in a ministry which builds upon the creative and constructive teachings of Jesus while emulating His flexibility of method. They contain the perfect blend of intellectual ardor with humane feeling, of deepest ethical ideals with an even deeper faith. They discover to man the heart of his Eternal Father and synthesize in His purpose all the mutations of man's marvelous evolutionary development. A backward glance shows that Christianity has assimilated mingled elements of Hebraism and Hellenism, incoming foreign cultures and mysticisms, the imperialism bequeathed by practical Rome and the pluralism of denominational sects and demands. The fact that its life blood has always circulated from Christ's parabolic messages, which unmistakably voice what lay nearest to His very heart, is the secret of its powers of absorption. All beliefs and practices with merely mundane values shrivel before His words. Nor do we wonder that inquiries are constantly made for increasing emphasis on the Christlikeness of the Almighty God. Jesus revealed Him in the parables in ways forever beyond the reach of theological formulæ, metaphysical abstractions, doctrinal

refinements and ecclesiastical institutions. His disclosures conduct us to heights unsullied by contention and bright with promise. There we breathe the fragrance of Nature as the product and the servant of the Supernatural. There our capacity is enlarged to know and enjoy the God of the fellowship of all saints.

Here, then, is the preacher's opportunity. He does not have to turn aside to the pretty god mis-called Humanism which so often implies abject idolatries. It accounts for much modern paganism in so far as it signifies the worship of man, or conceives the aggregate of mankind as the Supremacy of Being, or teaches that the ages will eventually extract from Time's womb a God yet to be created or in process of creation.<sup>50</sup> The revelation of the parables is pitted against these superstitions of realism and materialism. It is at your disposal and invokes your intellectual, moral and spiritual allegiance. It warns you against the worship of the measured, the logical, the dogmatic, to the degradation of the imaginative. France, most precise of nations, employed these attributes to her own detriment. She then evaded the real solution of social problems by her very free use of the guillotine, and later followed that precise reasoner, Napoleon, at the cost of the lives of three million Frenchmen and eighteen years of Continental war.

It is in the imagination of Jesus, as the source and light of Christian Idealism, that we must find Him afresh and preach Him in strict accord with all experience, including that of scientific knowl-

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<sup>50</sup> Cf. Albert Parker Fitch: *Preaching and Paganism*, p. 72 ff.; Lynn Harold Hough: *Evangelical Humanism*, p. 120 ff.

edge.<sup>51</sup> Such preaching is the *summum bonum* for an age greatest, where it thinks itself least and least where it is deemed greatest, blighted as it is by a famine of intellectual creativeness except in things material and choosing to express its attitude in the words of Goethe's Satan: "I am the Spirit who denies." Such preaching is the corrective for the moral madness which puts the sensory life in the saddle and reverts to instinct and impulse as the sole determiners of human conduct. It is the one sufficient agency for obtaining a working religious unity amid the complex conditions of modern society. The sociological problems will receive from this preaching a higher slogan than "Togetherness." Closer contact is essential, but what we bring to it is even more essential. Those who bring salvation to it must come with "the mind" that was "in Christ Jesus," which is the true mind of the Church, of her ministries and of her message to mankind.<sup>52</sup>

If science has split the ancient order of theology into a thousand fragments, it has not impaired by an iota the realities of religion, nor can it do aught else, when rightly recognized and used, than expand the imaginative powers of religious teaching. Christianity has nothing to fear from organized knowledge but much to fend off in the clamor for a return to the enchantments of externalism and to the lustful gods and goddesses of Dodona and Ilyssus. Matching the services of those who show that law governs the universe, it can yet demonstrate that

<sup>51</sup> Cf. Henry Jones: *Idealism as a Practical Creed*, p. 233 ff.; "On the Way to a Synoptic Philosophy," by R. F. Alfred Hoernlé, *Contemporary British Philosophy*, edited by J. H. Muirhead, Second Series, p. 131 ff.

<sup>52</sup> Philippians ii. 5.



love nevertheless controls life's iron necessities. The world of spirit in which our Lord is preëminent is not hemmed in by powers that work with enigmatical and unconcerned regularity for purposes purely mechanical. In that world the minister of God dreams and lives a more abundant life, undeterred by the conflicts raging in subordinate realms. For him man crowns creation, noble in reason, infinite in faculty, in form and motion express and admirable, in apprehension responsive to the appeal of the spiritual imagination. For him all truth and love are in Christ, from whose exalted personality streams a divine radiance upon the human heart, uniting God and man forever.



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